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THE

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THE

VICAR OF LANSDOWNE.

A TALE.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE

VICAR OF LANSDOWNE;

OR

COUNTRY QUARTERS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

REGINA MARIA ROCHE.

AUTHOR OF

The Children of the Abbey, Maid of the Hamlet, Clermont, &c

" Ye ſmiling band
" Of youths and virgins, who thro' all the maze
" Of young deſire with rival ſteps purſue
" The charm of beauty, if the pleaſing toil
" Can yield a moment's reſpite, hither turn
" Your *favourable* ear."

AKENSIDE.

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1800.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE

VICAR

OF

LANSDOWNE.

CHAP. I.

THE FAIR FUGITIVE.

THE Vicar was now placed in a ſtate of enviable happineſs. The health of his beloved ſon was daily acquiring its priſtine ſtrength. The mind of Roſina was penitently ſenſible of the impropriety and danger of her paſt conduct. Lydia began to feel the vanity of indulging the hopeleſs

wiſhes of her heart; and Miſs Margaret, participating in the general joy of her nephew's recovery, ſuppreſſed, at leaſt for the preſent, the little waſpiſh turbulency of ſpirit by which ſhe uſed, now and then, to deſtroy the tranquillity of others without promoting her own.

One morning, juſt after the ladies had retired from the breakfaſt-table, and the Vicar was preparing to take his daily ramble, Suſan entered the room; and, informing him that a perſon wanted to ſpeak with him, introduced, almoſt at the ſame inſtant, a young lady dreſſed in a riding habit, into the parlour. The ſurpriſe of the Vicar was increaſed, by the evident embarraſſment under which the lady appeared; but the politeneſs and urbanity with which he received her, in ſome degree quieted her agitation; and,

and, after a momentary pauſe, ſhe addreſſed herſelf to him in theſe words :—

" I cannot wonder, Sir, that you ſhould feel conſiderable ſurpriſe in receiving a viſit from a perſon who is altogether unknown to you. My name, Sir, is Maria Douglas. I am a native of Scotland, where I had the pleaſure of knowing your ſon ; and hearing, as I was travelling this way, of the melancholy accident which has happened to him, I could not reſiſt my inclination to make perſonal enquiries after the welfare of a gentleman who is ſo univerſally eſteemed."

" Francis, Madam," replied the Vicar, " is almoſt well ; and when I inform him of the honour which the kindneſs of your enquiries confers upon him, I am perſuaded the flattery of ſo high a compliment will much contribute to the further reſtoration of his health."

The lady bluſhed at this gallant obſervation of the Vicar's; and, caſting her eyes upon the ground, remained for ſome time confuſed and ſilent. A converſation, however, upon indifferent ſubjects enſued; during which a much longer time elapſed than is uſually employed in friendly viſits of this nature. The Vicar grew rather impatient. He thought that he perceived a ſtudied anxiety in the mind of the lady to delay her departure, and could not ſurmiſe the reaſon of it. He did not ſuſpect that ſhe entertained any ſiniſter deſign againſt the ſafety of his heart, yet he felt himſelf rather uneaſy on perceiving that he was occaſionally the object of great attention from a pair of very brilliant eyes, and he thought it prudent to interrupt the converſation. After ſome preliminary obſervations, therefore, he mentioned that there were

were ſome ladies in the family, who, he was ſure, would be extremely happy to have the pleaſure of ſeeing her, and procuring her ſome refreſhment. Riſing from his chair, he was advancing towards the door for the purpoſe of calling in his daughters, when Miſs Douglas, burſting into a flood of tears, ſtarted from the chair, and ſtopped him.

"Oh, Sir!" ſhe exclaimed, "how can I ſpeak to you? In me you behold an unhappy wanderer, who has voluntarily fled from the care, or rather from the perſecutions of her family, to place herſelf under the ſhelter of your protecting roof. Urged to the nuptial union of a man whom I can neither reverence or obey, becauſe my heart is unalterably engaged to another, I meditated on the moſt prudent means of avoiding my impending fate, and I found that I

had but one alternative, either to ſacrifice my happineſs, or to abandon my friends."

The violence of Miſs Douglas's feelings obliged her to pauſe. The Vicar continued to look at her with aſtoniſhment; but ſhe recovered herſelf in a few moments, and proceeded.

"I am ſinking, Sir, under my confuſion. You will perhaps accuſe me of imprudence; but my heart acquits me of the meaſure I have taken. It was the only means by which I could avoid eternal miſery. Induced by the knowledge of your benevolence, which I heard from a tongue moſt eloquent in its praiſe, and which, before I took this ſtep, I made it my ſtudy to have confirmed, I have flown to you for protection. You, who are a father to the fatherleſs, will, I hope, pity, ſhelter, and protect me. I ſhould be unworthy of your kindneſs were

were I to diſguiſe the truth. But Oh, Sir! how ſhall I find courage to tell you that you have a right to protect me? It is your Francis—your too amiable ſon—it is for his ſake that I have relinquiſhed fortune, abandoned my friends, and flown to you for protection."

This declaration of her paſſion for Francis threw Miſs Douglas into the moſt violent agonies; and the Vicar, hardly able to recover his ſpeech from the effects of his ſurpriſe, loſt all notion of the impropriety of her conduct, in his endeavours to ſooth her mind. When ſhe recovered, he expreſſed his amazement and diſapprobation of the raſh ſtep which ſhe had been induced to take; but he requeſted that ſhe would inform him of the circumſtances which had influenced her conduct, that he might be the better enabled to judge how far it was

honourable or expedient for him to comply with her requeſt; and ſhe related to him every particular with a degree of openneſs and candour which won his heart.

"I acknowledge, my dear young lady, that the relation you have given me has engaged my intereſt; but I cannot approve of your conduct. An elopement contains ſomething ſo repugnant to the feelings of delicacy, to thoſe trembling apprehenſions which Providence has implanted in the female breaſt, to preſerve the ſex from committing enormities derogatory to their character, that I confeſs the idea of it has always ſhocked me. An unpleaſing union, and the harſh conduct of relations, are the uſual excuſes to palliate this ſtep; and certainly nothing ſhort of extreme neceſſity ſhould induce a lady to expoſe both her perſon and reputation to the dangers of ſuch a

conduct.

conduct. But tell me candidly, did not the hope of ſeeing the object of your affection in ſome degree prompt you to undertake this meaſure? I perceive, by your bluſhes, that it did. As you have thrown yourſelf on my protection, you muſt allow me to ſpeak to you with the freedom of a friend; and I aſſure you the ſtricteſt conduct is required to retrieve the eſteem which is forfeited by ſuch a ſtep. You have deſired my protection; and my pride is flattered by the diſtinction you have paid me; but the rights of juſtice revolt at the idea; for in ſheltering you, I uſurp a privilege to which I have no pretenſion. As, however, your ſupplications are ſo extremely earneſt, and your preſent ſituation ſeems of neceſſity to require that ſomething ſhould be done, I ſhall conceal the place of your refuge until you can, by negociation, compromiſe matters with the

gentleman for whom you were deſigned, or effect, by ſome other means, a reconciliation with your friends. You ſhall be welcome to my houſe, until I can provide for you a proper retreat; for I am perſuaded your own ſenſe of delicacy will inform you of the impropriety of my permitting you, under theſe circumſtances, to ſee my ſon. My honour, as well as your delicacy, forbids it; and therefore, while he is confined to his chamber, I ſhall ſtudiouſly conceal from his knowledge that you are under my roof. I am ſorry to impoſe reſtraints upon you which may appear harſh or unpleaſant *to you*; but I have, I hope, ſucceſsfully endeavoured to preſerve my character unſullied; and were I to permit an interview with my ſon, the world might juſtly condemn me for encouraging filial diſobedience, for the ſake of

of gratifying a paſſion which circumſtances ſeem to render hopeleſs."

As the Vicar ſpoke theſe words, the tear ran down the cheeks of Miſs Douglas, in the bittereſt anguiſh. But he could not help ſpeaking the real ſentiments of his mind; and, however ſhe might feel their ſeverity, he thought it his duty to rebuke her for contemning the authority of her friends, though he highly diſapproved of the tyranny of their conduct.

"Oh, Sir!" ſhe replied, "you ſeem to think me inſenſible to the feelings of delicacy. Did you but know the weight of thoſe ſenſations, which, more poignant than ten thouſand daggers, now ſtab me to the ſoul, you would not ſo ſeverely condemn me.—Caſt me not from you thus friendleſs and unſupported. The ſentiments by which you wiſh the conduct of your own daughters

to be guided, ſhall be the rule to govern mine. You ſhall guide, direct, and govern me as you pleaſe. I will not attempt, I will not even wiſh, if it be poſſible, to ſee your ſon. He ſhall not, by my means, know of the elopement I have made; but do, Sir, like a father to the unprotected, ſcreen and comfort me."

The benevolence of the Vicar expanded to the affecting ſoftneſs of this addreſs. It was the warm plea of helpleſs innocence;—and when he looked at the nature of her ſituation, he thought that ſhe reſembled a little harmleſs lamb which had ſtrayed from its fold, and wanted a ſhepherd to guard it from the dangers of its random liberty.—His heart became intereſted for her welfare, and his partiality induced him to conſider the imprudence of her enterprize as the venial tranſgreſſion of thoughtleſs youth.—

He

He preſſed her, as if ſhe had been his own child, with fond affection to his boſom; and, mingling a tear with her's, reiterated his promiſe of protection and concealment. He tenderly cheered her depreſſed ſpirits, and, ſmiling, told her that he would ſend for thoſe who would revive them more effectually.

He then ſummoned the ladies into the parlour, who inſtantly made their appearance. They had indeed been for ſome time ſuſpended on the rack of curioſity by their father's *tête-à-tête*; eſpecially as Suſan had declared that the ſtranger was young and handſome.

The uſual ſalutations took place; and the narrative which Miſs Douglas had given to the Vicar was now, in a ſhorter manner, recapitulated to them. This inſtance of her confidence increaſed the prepoſſeſſion

which

which her engaging countenance had already excited in her favour; and ſhe was careſſed, flattered, and complimented by all the family: a thouſand fond appellations were beſtowed upon her; ſiſter! friend! companion! Miſs Margaret aſſured her that ſhe admired her ſpirit; and verily believed that they were related to the ſame anceſtor, as one of the Lairds of Douglas, ſhe ſaid, had formerly married a very diſtant relation of their family. An apartment was prepared for her reception with great alacrity; and a meſſenger diſpatched to the inn in the village, where ſhe had alighted from the carriage, to fetch her clothes. The warmth of the ſeaſon, and the duſt of the roads had rendered her preſent dreſs unpleaſant; and upon the return of the meſſenger with her things, ſhe dreſſed herſelf with a nicety which ſeemed to indicate a hope that the Vicar would relent,

relent, or that chance would contrive an interview between her and Francis.

"Sure enough!" ſaid Miſs Margaret, "I recollect that in his ravings I did hear him pronounce the name of Maria.—And pray, dear Madam, how did you contrive your eſcape? I dare ſay it gave you ſome trouble before you hit on an expedient. Was it a ſilk ladder, or——"

"I ſhall with pleaſure relate to you every particular of my eſcape," ſaid Miſs Douglas, "when my ſpirits are a little more compoſed; I can aſſure you it was not by the intervention of ſupernatural means."

The mind of the Vicar was rendered exceſſively uneaſy by the event which had happened. To uſurp the rights of others, and to ſcreen a young lady from her connections, were repugnant to his principles of probity. Beſide, he had only heard her own

own ſtory; and though it was told with the apparent artleſſneſs of truth, circumſtances might materially vary the complexion of the facts ſhe had related. He had given his promiſe, however, to protect her, and a promiſe with him was ſacred and inviolable; but he determined to perſevere in his reſolution of concealing her arrival at the Vicarage from the knowledge of his ſon. This reſolution, however, muſt in a ſhort time prove abortive, if ſhe continued in the houſe, as an interview would be inevitable on the releaſe of Francis from his chamber; an event which was expected to take place in a few days. Some dangers alſo preſented themſelves to the Vicar's mind, by affording to his daughters the company and converſation of ſo enterpriſing a genius. His ſiſter had already too much corrupted the integrity of their minds by

the nonſenſe of her romantic notions; and he dreaded leſt the example of a ſucceſsful heroine ſhould induce them, in a fit of female Quixotiſm, to decamp with ſome ſighing Pylades, or gallant Orondates. But he confined the ſecret of his fears to his own boſom; and determined to counteract the prevalence of example, by unremitted vigilance and circumſpection, until time ſhould afford him a more favourable opportunity of removing the danger.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

THE UNEXPECTED INTERVIEW.

THE complexion of Miſs Douglas reſembled the colour of the apple bloſſom, ſo beautifully were the tints of white and red blended on her cheeks. Her perſon was of the middling ſtature; and ſhe poſſeſſed a certain *je ne ſais quoi*, which gave ſmartneſs, elegance, and eaſe to her manners. Her eyes were full of ſpirit and brilliancy. An arch expreſſion in her countenance denoted the

the quickneſs of her diſcernment; and her converſation proved that her ideas were numerous and refined. To a happy facility of expreſſion, ſhe joined a diſpoſition for raillery; but a good-natured ſmile which played round her lips, gave a certain aſſurance that it was affectation or haughtineſs alone which could provoke the ſeverity of her ridicule. The excellence of her natural underſtanding was extremely improved by education; and her high ſpirit and exceſſive ſenſibility, contributed not a little to increaſe the ſhrewdneſs of her wit. As the errors into which the livelineſs of her character would ſometimes betray her, never amounted to faults, ſhe was careleſs of concealing them; and the honeſt freedom of her manners, the openneſs of her countenance, and the candour of her conduct, beſpoke her ignorance of art. The charming

ſweetneſs

ſweetneſs of her voice was a perfect type of her temper; and juſt ſufficient of the Scotch accent predominated on her tongue to denote the place of her birth. On the whole, we may ſay with juſtice, that ſhe was the prudent girl, who would ſtart with apprehenſion at the moſt diſtant approach of danger to virtue; and the romantic girl, who would laugh at a trip to Gretna Green, and fly with alacrity and pleaſure to the world's end with the man of her heart.

There are, without doubt, many ſober-minded, thinking mortals, who will condemn elopement as an unpardonable crime; and it is vain to deſire ſuch cynics to make any allowances for the feelings of a tender and warm-hearted girl, juſtly apprehenſive of being forced to ſurrender her eternal happineſs in this world, to the mercenary tyranny of inconſiderate relations; ſuch

cenſors

cenſors will allow no weight to the force of affection againſt the preponderating ſcale of intereſt. There are alſo many nice obſervers of the human character, who will, perhaps, accuſe of her indelicacy in chuſing the Vicar's houſe as the a ylum of her fears; but they who thus condemn, muſt be ignorant of the irriſiſtible charms with which a young, handſome, and adoring lover attracts the heart—a lover too for the ſafety of whoſe health, her boſom, at the moment, beat with anxious palpitation. We acknowledge that we entertain conſiderable predilection for our young itinerant; and, to uſe a phraſe of Welford's, ſhould be tempted to poſt ſuch cenſors to Coventry, for one week at leaſt, as ill-natured beings; we therefore truſt they will forbear to cenſure.

The diſcovery which her arrival at the Vicarage occaſioned, ſeemed to impute

ſlyneſs

ſlyneſs and concealment to Francis; and the girls determined to take ſome favourable opportunity to extort from him the ſecret of his love.

The circumſpect behaviour of Maria gained, by degrees, upon the approbation of the Vicar. The critical inveſtigation which he was continually making into her character, could diſcover no material defect. She appeared to him perfectly artleſs and innocent; and, as her only foibles were being a little too high-ſpirited and romantic, he began to entertain for her the tendereſt affection. The pleaſing good-humour which ſhe was conſtantly exerciſing for his amuſement, delighted him extremely. She attended him like his own daughters; and frequently flew almoſt into his arms with acknowledgments that he was her parent, her friend, her protector. But in deſpite of theſe cordial

dial and ſeductive blandiſhments, he remained inexorable to her petitions to ſee Francis: not that ſhe remonſtrated againſt the propriety of his inhibition; but a ſly hint was now and then thrown out, ſeconded by Miſs Margaret and the girls, to which he turned a deaf ear, and verified the old apothegm, "That none are ſo deaf as thoſe who won't hear."

The engaging behaviour of Maria ſeduced Roſina, Lydia, and even Miſs Margaret herſelf, from their true allegiance to the Vicar. The oſtenſible objections which he threw out againſt the propriety of indulging the lovers with an interview, were, to their minds, harſh and futile; and judging of the feelings of others by what they knew their own would be upon the ſame occaſion, they concerted among themſelves in what manner the meeting could be beſt contrived;

trived; Roſina obſerving, that her father could not poſſibly be angry with the ſucceſs of their ſcheme, as he was for ever telling them to do as they would be done by. But to obtain from Francis an acknowledgment of his paſſion for Miſs Douglas, was agreed by them all to be an indiſpenſable preliminary.

One evening they propoſed to drink tea with Francis in his room; apologizing at the ſame time to Miſs Douglas, for the neceſſity they ſhould be under of leaving her alone in the parlour. Miſs Douglas, with a degree of ſenſibility which affected the Vicar, begged that ſhe might be no reſtraint to their inclination; and they accordingly ordered the tea-things to be carried up ſtairs, where the Vicar attended.

The converſation was artfully turned upon the ſtate of their brother's heart; and the

Vicar

Vicar perceived the ecclairciſſement to which the introduction of this topic might lead; but as he had no objection to a little innocent raillery, he joined in the converſation.

"Tell me, my boy," ſaid he, "for what bright northern ſtar did you now and then forſake the claſſics?"

"Pray, brother," cried Lydia, "let us know who was the object of your paſtorals on the banks of the Tweed?"

"Whether ſhe was handſome?" ſaid Roſina; "or, as Sedgeley ſays, if her hair was of that luxuriant golden colour, with which the poets have ſo often ſtrung the bow of Cupid?"

"Come, come, Francis," exclaimed Miſs Margaret, "we have heard more than you imagine; ſo pray be ingenuous, and tell us all your adventures in Scotland: I love to hear particulars."

"I will be ingenuous, then," cried he; "and, ſince you have found a miſtreſs for me, I will deſcribe the one which I have found for myſelf. You deſire to hear all my adventures, and here I begin.

"At the Univerſity I was very ſtudious and very happy, and I contracted a great intimacy and friendſhip with the Laird of Falkirk's ſon. In an excurſion, which he took laſt vacation, I accompanied him; and you know, Sir, I gave you ſome account of our route. It was begun at a ſeaſon of the year when the country appeared to as much advantage as it was poſſible for one, of whoſe ſterility ſo much has been ſaid."

"Pray, nephew," ſaid Miſs Margaret, who was thinking more of the miſtreſs than of ſterility, "are not the Scotch women rather clumſy and awkward?"

"By

"By no means, Madam. They are, as in every other nation under the ſun, ſome pleaſing, ſome unpleaſing. Beauty is not excluſively confined to any clime; nor is uglineſs entailed upon any particular ſociety.

"But to proceed. We examined all the curioſities that lay within the compaſs of our tour. The beauties of Roſlin Caſtle particularly attracted our attention. The fine old ruin impreſſes the mind with the moſt pleaſing, the moſt awful, the moſt ſoothing ſenſations. We ſaw that celebrated lake, which, though encompaſſed with frozen waters itſelf, remains free from the icy fetters of winter. This phenomenon has puzzled many philoſophers. Nature, as if to teaze the inquiſitive mind, ſometimes caſts a veil over her operations, which the curious vainly endeavour to penetrate.—Sufficient is indeed already open to ſatisfy

the curioſity of man; but curioſity is boundleſs, and the thirſt of knowledge inſatiable.

"Scotland has now a much more fertile aſpect than when the great genius of Engliſh literature, Johnſon, travelled through part of it; and was tempted to remark, that a tree was a kind of phenomenon. And as the underſtandings of its inhabitants become more enlightened, and their manners more refined, the importance of agriculture, the happineſs of concord, the pleaſures of civilization will more forcibly ſtrike them. That unhappy barbariſm, which created thoſe feuds that deſcended in an hereditary line from father to ſon, will gradually wear away; the olive branch ſhall bloom amongſt every clan, and all will join mutual endeavours to promote and render permanent the

peace,

peace, improvement, and proſperity of their native country.

"My friend and I experienced, upon ſeveral occaſions, the nobleſt hoſpitality.—We frequently ſpent two or three days together in the ſame houſe during our route.—Theſe intervals from travelling afforded us opportunities of remarking ſome of the native cuſtoms of the people. The loud notes of the piper, ycleped muſician to the family, awaked us regularly every morning. Obeying the lively ſummons, we repaired to the great hall, where we generally found all the gentlemen aſſembled, to enjoy the keen air of the morning, and laying in a ſtore of food which a modern fine gentleman would pronounce ſufficient for an Eaſt India voyage. Upon theſe occaſions, thoſe ſtrong liquors with which their bowls are uſually repleniſhed, are not ſpared; but from theſe

enjoyments my friend and I excuſed ourſelves, and breakfaſted upon the more wholeſome beverage of milk. After our repaſt, we mounted our courſers, and prepared to hunt, which, if I may ſpeak from experience, I conſider as one of the moſt joyful exerciſes of human invention. It gives a flow to the animal ſpirits, a ſwift circulation to the blood, a pure and delightful health to the whole frame. A long chace gave us ſharp appetites for the ſubſtantial fare of a well-covered table, and the evening generally concluded with a dance. We ſlept on heath freſh pulled from the mountains, rolled ourſelves up in plaids, and nothing could be pleaſanter."

"Pray, nephew," ſaid Miſs Margaret, "did you ſee the ruins of Macbeth Caſtle?"

"I did, Madam, and walked the very battlement on which they aſſert that Lady Macbeth, even now, appears every night."

"Did

"Did you viſit," aſked ſhe, "the plain on which the witches performed their ſpells?"

"We did; and if I were inclined to be ſuperſtitious, I might conclude they were condeſcending to pay us a viſit; for a dreadful ſtorm of thunder, lightning, and of rain, overtook us on our way, the increaſing violence of which we ſhould not have diſregarded, had we not been highly amuſed with the terrors it excited in a young fellow who had travelled with us ſome miles: but his apprehenſions are ſcarcely to be wondered at, as he was brought up in the wildeſt part of the Hebrides with an old romantic aunt."

Miſs Margaret, conſtruing this concluſion into an oblique hint againſt herſelf, looked rather diſconcerted. The Vicar and

the girls ſmiled in ſecret, and enjoyed her confuſion.

Francis, recollecting the impropriety of his expreſſion, immediately added, "that ſhe was remarkably ignorant and ſtupid."

"Aye, ſo I thought," ſaid Miſs Margaret: "proceed, Francis."

"This ignorant, ſtupid old aunt," continued Francis very innocently, "had worked ſo much on the natural credulity of her nephew's fancy, that he firmly believed the exiſtence of ſuch beings as witches.—Shakeſpeare's dreadful hurly burly was uppermoſt in his thoughts, and he every moment expected to ſee broom-ſticks cleaving the air, and thoſe high-capped dames conjuring ſpells for his deſtruction, ſimilar to thoſe which are ſaid to have announced the fall of Duncan, and the treacherous proſperity of Macbeth. In truth, the ſcene was

ſufficiently

ſufficiently wild and gloomy to inſpire a mind untinctured by ſuperſtition with congenial horrors. The hoarſe whiſtling of the wind, the tempeſtuous violence of the rain, and the darkneſs of the evening, combined their powers to appal the mind. The increaſing tempeſt, however, became too ſevere for the indulgence of our mirth; and to ſave ourſelves from its violence, we haſtened towards a glimmering light, which conducted us to a hovel. Here we found an elderly woman baking ſome oaten bread over a ſmall fire. She received us very courteouſly; ſent a little girl into a ſhed for more heath fuel; aſſiſted us in drying our clothes; and at laſt ſet the oaten bread, with ſome ſpirits and warm milk, before us. Perhaps never, till this moment, was I ſo perfectly convinced of the eaſe with which nature may be ſatisfied, or how much

ſweeter than the moſt ſumptuous luxuries a little fatigue will render the homelieſt fare. I muſt deny what has been ſaid by ſome, that our deſires and paſſions are naturally immoderate. We come pure from the hands of our Creator; and it is education, example, folly, and faſhion, which render our wiſhes inordinate, and our gratification of them intemperate. We finiſhed the food which the good woman had ſet before us with the keeneſt reliſh, and ſlept for ſome hours on a little pallet. By the firſt gray ſtrokes of dawn, however, we left her, not ungrateful to us for the manner in which we expreſſed the ſenſe we entertained of her hoſpitality."

"Pray, brother," ſaid Lydia, "did you ſee the Grampian Hills?"

"Yes, Lydia, and thought of your favourite Norval in Douglas. The play luckily

luckily was in my pocket, and I peruſed it in a cottage oppoſite to them. The ſhepherd's ſlothful life, his youthful enthuſiaſm for arms, his love of virtue, the viciſſitudes of his life, and its fatal end, ſo beautifully repreſented by the poet, all occurred to me, ſtrengthened by the powers of imagination, and I frequently raiſed my eyes to thoſe hills where he ſaid, "that among the ſhepherds' humble cots the bloſſoms of his youth had blown."

"My friend introduced me to his relation, the Laird of ——, who has a houſe, or rather a caſtle, pleaſantly ſituated on a ſmall iſland. This might indeed be ſtyled the ſeat of feſtive hoſpitality. His own family were numerous, good-natured, and ſprightly, and there were ſeveral gueſts then with them from Edinburgh; amongſt them a young lady, of whom my friend cautioned

me, ſaying, 'Gude troth, my dear laddie, you muſt ſteel your heart well againſt her; for Maria Douglas is quite the *belle* at Edinburgh.' Had you ſeen her, Madam, you would not have aſked me if the Scotch women were in general awkward and clumſy. Grace, eaſe, elegance, all the ſymmetry of beauty are united in her perſon; lively, innocent, modeſt; in ſhort——"

"In ſhort, Francis," ſaid Roſina, "the very girl you could be tempted to like."

"Tempted! Ah, Roſina!"

"During our ſtay at the Laird's houſe, we were as gay as felicity and feſtivity could make us. The approaching rigour of the ſeaſon, and the barrenneſs of the country, affording us no amuſement without doors, we were continually contriving new amuſements to divert the time within; and Miſs Douglas was the life and ſpirit of our party.

With

With great good-nature ſhe undertook to teach me the Scotch reel, a kind of national dance, and with ſuch an inſtructor I could not avoid proficiency. The bagpipes invited us every evening to a dance in the great hall; and we had frequently little concerts, where melting notes, indeed, were warbled from love breathing lips. At length, the whole party ſet off for Edinburgh. I did not require many entreaties to accompany them. To confeſs a truth, I ſhould have been cruelly diſappointed if they had not invited me."

"So then, Francis," ſaid the Vicar, "you did not return to the Univerſity for a conſiderable time after the vacation had ended?"

"La, brother!" cried Miſs Margaret, "how can you aſk ſuch a queſtion? Do you ſuppoſe a man in love ever thought of his ſtudies?

ſtudies? Proceed, Francis; I am quite impatient for the ſequel."

"Our journey to Edinburgh was the perfection of delight; and the weather, though froſty, being remarkably fine, gave us an opportunity, as we paſſed along, to examine every thing that was curious and worth ſeeing. Edinburgh, on our arrival, was in its meridian of gaiety. The theatre was open; and aſſemblies, both public and private, afforded conſtant amuſements.—This city has been ſo often deſcribed, that a deſcription from me would be ſuperfluous. The deſign of the houſes, from the height to which they are raiſed, and the confuſion of tongues which are heard under the ſame roof, ſeems to have been taken from a recollection of the Tower of Babel. The opportunity, however, which this ſtyle of architecture afforded us, of being united, as it were,

were, into one family, contributed, I fancy, to increaſe the pleaſures of us all. There are many ſocieties in this metropolis ſtyled Oyſter Clubs, and into one of them we ſoon got admiſſion. The entertainment of it was pleaſant enough. At an early hour we played cards or danced, juſt as inclination led us, and finiſhed the evening with a ſimple ſupper, where mirth, harmony, and convivial temperance preſided. We viſited the New Town, which promiſes a perfect contraſt to the old one, being clean, light, and elegant. We aſcended the Calton-Hill, but the evening was rather tempeſtuous, and a number of laughable incidents enſued.—The ladies were blown about; hats and caps puffed away; and an old beau, juſt as he had gained the ſummit, loſing his perriwig, ſtood ſhivering, with his pate uncovered, like a bald crow on the Mount of Teneriffe.

Teneriffe. As the froſt increaſed, our entertainments redoubled. It is a long eſtabliſhed cuſtom, when the neighbouring lakes of the city are frozen, to have light elegant phaetons made, in which the gentlemen diſplay their gallantry, by drawing the ladies upon the ice. Miſs Douglas, with two or three of her companions, mounted one of theſe vehicles, to which, with five other gentlemen, I had the honour to be harneſſed."

"How delightful!" cried the girls.

"How abſurd!" ſaid the Vicar; "except, indeed, that it may ſerve to remind men of their affinity to aſſes."

"How like a triumphant entry!" exclaimed Miſs Margaret.—"I really did not imagine the Scotch poſſeſſed ſo much taſte; they muſt certainly have borrowed it from the Romans. It was—yes, I think it was

Nero who was drawn about by beautiful women."

"We did not, however, continue to exerciſe our honourable employment for any length of time. A rumour circulated that the ice was cracked; and the gentlemen quickly diſengaging themſelves from their trappings, ſlid precipitately to the ſhore. Thoſe who knew the falſity of the report laughed; thoſe who thought it true trembled; but none ventured to our aſſiſtance. It might literally be ſaid, that they reſolved not to truſt themſelves on ſlippery ground. I aſcribe not to myſelf any particular merit for not deſerting my poſt; they would all, perhaps, have ſtaid, had they been equally intereſted. The ladies ſcreamed; Miſs Douglas fainted with terror. I caught her in my arms; and, forgetting my ſituation, attempted to bear her from the carriage; but

but my feet ſlipped, and I received ſo violent a fall, that it deprived me of my ſenſes, and effectually ſet love and gallantry at nought. On my recovery I found myſelf in a houſe. My firſt enquiry was after my fair companions, whom I heard were in perfect ſafety; and the gentle accent of Miſs Douglas's voice at that moment reaching my ears, I raiſed my eyes, and ſaw a tear of tenderneſs and pity ſtealing down her cheek. It was a balm of comfort to me, powerful enough to heal contuſions much more ſevere than thoſe I had received. The gentlemen rallied me on my Quixotiſm.—'Gude troth,' cried one, 'you was a fooliſh laddie, or you would not have ſtaid. I promiſe you I ſhould na' have remained, if even aſſured of viſiting Amphitrite's bower, and having an elegy and knell from mermaids and Tritons.'

"There

"There was a ball that evening, to which all the party, Miſs Douglas and myſelf excepted, went. I was unable to go; and ſhe declared that ſhe could not think of neglecting a perſon, whoſe anxiety for her ſafety had prevented his attendance. You may believe me when I ſay, that I envied none of them their pleaſure. From this evening, I imagine, Miſs Douglas may date the commencement of a paſſion, which ſhe, unfortunately for herſelf, conceived for me. Whether it was pity or gratitude, ſingle or combined, which operated in my favour, I I cannot determine; but from this period ſhe diſtinguiſhed me by very particular attentions. There was a ſoftneſs in her voice when ſhe addreſſed me—a marked attention in her manner when ſhe liſtened to me, not a little ſoothing to my love, and flattering to my pride. Our adventure upon the ice excited

excited the pruriency of wit. The Muſes were peſtered with invocations; and lampoons were circulated in every quarter of the town. Some of them were ſtyled, "The Downfall of Gallantry;" ſome, "The New Don Quixote;" ſome, "The Unhappy Rumour;" and ſome, "The Diſtreſſed Dulcineas." Nay, I did not eſcape: a poem containing ſeveral cantos, appeared, called, "The Sick Knight Errant, or the Second Fall of Apollo;" and many other fine performances, which the heat of envy produced from the brain of dullneſs.

"One of thoſe moments, which perhaps the wiſeſt of people ſometimes experience, when Caution deſerts her charge, and the whole ſoul is left to the inſtinctive dictate of Nature and its feelings, produced a diſcloſure of the mutual tenderneſs which had for ſome time been engendering in our boſoms;

boſoms; and as you deſired, and I promiſed, a candid recital, I acknowledge we made profeſſions of love to each other, which were mutually ardent, and I fear mutually hopeleſs. She told me that ſhe was under a contract to marry a gentleman, or forfeit the whole of her fortune. Her romantic generoſity inclined her to give up all for me; but I was not baſe enough to take advantage of her fondneſs. I ſcorned the idea. I could not think of plunging an object I loved into complicated diſtreſſes, for the mean conſideration of my own happineſs. I endeavoured to conquer my paſſion for my generous admirer; and, ſuppreſſing the ſelfiſh dictates of tenderneſs, reſolved on forcing myſelf away.

"She oppoſed, while ſhe ſilently applauded the propriety of my reſolution, and wept while ſhe contemplated that it was the higheſt

higheſt proof I could give her of my love, my honour, and my generoſity. I tore myſelf from the woman I love more than language can expreſs, and quitted Edinburgh with a heart overwhelmed by the torment of deſpair. I am not ſo romantic as to ſay that I am a wretched being; but I may truly ſay that I am unhappy. I cannot poſitively aſſert that my paſſion is indelible; but I may venture to affirm, that I believe it will never be eradicated. The impetuous kind of love which ſuperficial charms, or violent admiration, excite, may, perhaps, be extinguiſhed; but that love which riſes on the foundation of rational eſteem, is increaſed rather than diminiſhed by time."

The moment he had concluded this candid acknowledgment, a voice was heard to cry—"Good troth, I can hold out no longer. You muſt excuſe me, Mr. Ouſeley; I cannot

I cannot poſſibly remain any longer inviſible to my Francis;" and Maria Douglas ruſhed forward into his arms!—Francis, aſtoniſhed at the unexpected interview, had only power, for ſome minutes, to preſs her to his throbbing breaſt.

"Is it poſſible!" he cried when he recovered his voice; "can I believe my ſenſes?"

"I hope ſo," ſaid Miſs Douglas, ſlily raiſing her eyes. "Oh Francis! in what light will you ſee the ſtep that I have taken?"

An explanation enſued between the two lovers, which relieved Francis from the ſurpriſe he felt. But the Vicar was not ſo eaſily ſatisfied with the impatient violation of Maria's promiſe.

"Miſs Douglas!" he exclaimed with anger, "you have uſed me treacherouſly. You

You have broken a promiſe, the performance of which, you well know, was the condition upon which I engaged to conceal and protect you. I am now free from all obligations, and ſhall certainly inform your relations of your retreat."

"It is impoſſible, Sir," ſaid Francis, with ſome warmth, "that ſhe can behave treacherouſly; nor can you be ſo barbarous as to diſcover her retreat."

"Indeed, Mr. Ouſeley," ſaid Maria, while the tears trickled down her cheeks, I acknowledge that I have done wrong; but I truſt that you will make allowances for the fault I have committed. Do not, I beſeech you, diſcloſe my retreat. Be kind, be humane, and extend your protection a little farther. I have written to the gentleman to whom I was betrothed, upon a hope that he will compromiſe the terms of our contract.

contract. I expect an answer very soon; and I then give you my word of honour that I shall be contented to be guided wholly and solely as you please."

Francis with one arm pressed her to his bosom, with the other hand wiped away her tears. To speak the truth, her tears soon stopped; and we imagine she was never better disposed for laughing in her life, if she had not been afraid of increasing the Vicar's disapprobation.

The Vicar's heart was not inexorable; and upon dispassionate reflection, he could scarcely condemn Maria for loving so passionately an object which he himself regarded with unbounded affection.

Maria pleaded her cause with the artless eloquence of nature. The Vicar saw the languid eyes of Francis reanimate with

their former luſtre. The fluſh of joy tinged his pale cheek, and fully witneſſed how much the reſtoration of his health depended on the continuance of his preſent happineſs.

When Mr. Ouſeley, therefore, contemplated the little group which ſurrounded him, and reflected that it was in his power to render them completely happy, or completely miſerable, his feelings ſubdued his anger; a benignant ſmile overſpread his countenance, and a tear fell from his eye.

"Oh my children!" cried the good old man, "my ſoul rejoices in contributing to your happineſs. The ardent wiſh, the unremitting prayer of my life, is to render your felicity permanent and ſecure; for from your enjoyments I derive my own.

But

But be aſſured, my lovely children, that without a ſtrict adherence to purity and rectitude, happineſs muſt be evaneſcent and imperfect."

The Vicar revolving every circumſtance, very naturally concluded that this ſcheme had been concerted. He examined Maria's dreſs, and obſerved it was uncommonly nice. A new cap which ſhe had on, and which he recollected ſhe and Roſina had been very buſy making in the morning, confirmed his ſuſpicion. From this trifling circumſtance ſome may, perhaps, blame him for not foreſeeing the plot which it diſcovered to be in agitation; but the Vicar was a very innocent man.

He determined, however, to chide his daughters very ſeverely for promoting an interview which they knew he wiſhed to

discourage; but before he had an opportunity to fulfil his intention, his resentment abated; and, feeling an admonition quite awkward, he dropped the idea entirely.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

THE STORY OF MARIA DOUGLAS.

THE Vicar's family were all aſſembled round a very cheerful fire ſide one evening, with good-humour in their countenances and harmony in their hearts, when Maria, ſitting by her Francis, and being in a very talkative temper, conſented to give them a ſketch of her hiſtory.

"With very white teeth, very brilliant eyes, an elegant perſon, great pride, exceſſive generoſity, a good heart, illuſtrious

pedigree, and no fortune, Captain Douglas was univerſally admired.

"Being at a ball, at a place where he was quartered, he fortunately, or unfortunately, danced himſelf into the good graces of a young lady, the daughter of a man who had amaſſed conſiderable opulence by trade.—The voice of prudence was too weak to counteract that of mutual inclination, and Hymen ſoon conſecrated a paſſion which "the purple wings of love" had already fanned into more than a lambent flame. My mother reminds me of Hawkeſworth's beautiful deſcription of Minerva. The lily and the roſe were blended in her complexion;—and the ineffable mildneſs of dignity overſpread her countenance. Her mind, open, liberal, humane, and cultivated, was a perfect contraſt to her father's. To a ſoul like her's, the tinſelled glare of wealth, all the pomps,

pomps, the luxuries, the embelliſhments of oſtentatious grandeur, were nothing in compariſon to an union with the object of her affections: but her parent remained inexorable.

"By increaſing the number of her attractions, he entertained the mercenary hope of making a more advantageous bargain with the man who might be enamoured of her charms. With this view, he improved the liberal gifts ſhe had received from nature by every embelliſhment which an expenſive education could beſtow; and to prevent the propenſities of youth from fruſtrating the objects of his deſign, had already conſummated a treaty of marriage for her with a rich, powerful, and depraved old peer. Her union with my father, therefore, excited the inſatiable reſentment of diſappointed avarice and ambition;

expelled from the breaſt of her father, the few feelings which nature had planted in his heart; and taught him to behold a ſtep to which the refinements of love had led, with the unforgiving eye of eternal rancour. No prayers, no entreaties, no ſubmiſſion could ſoften his obduracy; and, altering his will, he left every thing that he was worth to an only ſon.

"My parents, in ſpite of fortune, enjoyed the moſt perfect felicity; they were all to each other; and a congenial love leſſened the diſtreſſes which a limited income too often produces.

"The gentle ſpirit of my mother, conſcious of the almoſt indiſpenſable obligation of filial duty, frequently lamented the implacable diſpoſition of her father; and the idea of having eſcaped from the arms of miſery to the boſom of happineſs, alone ſupported

ported her in renouncing it. My little troubleſome ſelf increaſed their felicity, and I was ſo great a pet, that ſeveral wiſe people prognoſticated I ſhould turn out an unruly, bold, flirting girl, and teaze the good ſoul to whoſe lot I ſhould eventually fall."

Francis, upon this obſervation, preſſed the hand of Maria to his lips, and whiſpered, we preſume, ſome compliment in her ear, as ſhe ſmiled, and looked extremely pleaſed.

"I had attained my fourth year," continued Miſs Douglas, "when my father, who had been ſent in purſuit of ſome deſerters, returned from the unſucceſsful chace, heated, flurried, and fatigued. The fears of his wife appeared but too well founded. He was ſeized with a fever of ſo malignant a nature, that, in a few days, it

left him a breathleſs corpſe upon her wretched boſom.

"In the prime of his days he expired.—Oh Death! thou cruel deſpoiler of happineſs, how often doſt thou ſteal into the ſweet domeſtic circle, and ſnatch from a little harmleſs ſet of beings their dear protector!"

"My dear child," ſaid the Vicar, as ſhe pauſed for ſome minutes, "let us not murmur at what Heaven ordains. Death, it is true, often clouds the faireſt proſpects, and breaks aſunder the ſweeteſt bonds; but, concealed as the deſigns of Providence are from us, how do we know but ſome worldly viciſſitudes might, in a ſhort time, equally embitter our ſtate. He that deprives us of friends can ſupport us in the hour of deſolation; and he that takes a guardian from the

the orphan can preſerve her under the ſhadow of his wings."

"My mother," continued Miſs Douglas, "was bowed down by affliction. Her grief was not tempeſtuous; it was ſilent and intenſe. In the grave of her Douglas was interred her peace. The alteration, as I have been informed, which grief made in her appearance during the ſhort period of a week, is almoſt incredible: from being a handſome, florid young creature, ſhe became a weak, pale, emaciated ſhadow.

"My uncle was one of thoſe inſignificant characters who glide quietly through life without creating eſteem; and as he was devoid of all ſenſibility, he did not regret the loſs of thoſe pleaſures which ſenſibility alone can feel. He had received what is ſtyled a liberal education, but what in reality gave him only ſuperficial ideas of

good-breeding, a contempt for trade, and a love for thoſe vulgar pleaſures, in the enjoyment of which the ſenſes alone participate. His lady was one of thoſe high ſpirited dames from whom Shakeſpeare probably drew his character of Catherine;* and, being deſcended from a great, though indigent family, ſhe imagined that ſhe condeſcended ſo much by allying herſelf with the ſon of a Cit, that ſhe might treat him as ſhe pleaſed. He was not, however, quite ſo ſubmiſſive as Sir John Enville in the Spectator; and their days might truly be ſaid to paſs away in the midſt of croſſneſs, contradiction, and diſquietude. At length came the reſiſtleſs mandate which called her to the peaceful grave. Her huſband bore his loſs with diſſembling decency. He conformed to the eſtabliſhed rules of ſorrow, and

* Taming of a Shrew.

and dreſſed his face in clouds, his form in weeds; but his heart beat with ſilent rapture at his emancipation. The tempeſtuous voyage of matrimony, during which he had ſo long ſought in vain for the haven of quietude and reſt, was now performed; and all the toils and dangers he had experienced and eſcaped, made him reſolve never more to ſeek for happineſs on its troubled ocean. He determined to try the calm and gentle ſtream of retired life; and in making his arrangements for this purpoſe, my mother and myſelf, being the neareſt relations that he had, were ſent for to bear him company.

"I had nearly attained the tenth year of my age, when my beloved mother ſunk under the oppreſſive weight of ſorrow which had deſtroyed her conſtitution, and corroded her heart, from the period of her huſband's death.

death. Thus did I loſe both my parents juſt as my mind was beginning to expand to a ſenſe of their affection; juſt as I was acquiring a capacity to return their tenderneſs with gratitude and attention.

"Dear and valued objects, how often has my heart lamented your untimely fate, and paid the tribute of pity and reſpect to your memories and misfortunes! How often have I felt the loſs of your ſoothing tenderneſſes, and vainly ſought for thoſe who ſhould ſupply them!"

"Not vainly, I hope," ſaid Francis. She ſmiled expreſſively in his face, and proceeded.

"My uncle was born in Scotland, and he had conceived all thoſe prejudices in favour of his native country which, from the few obſervations I have had the opportunity of making, generally attach themſelves to narrow

row and illiberal minds; and the vicinity of Edinburgh was choſen as the place of our reſidence. He provided me with a very careful governeſs to ſuperintend my education, and really behaved to me, in all reſpects, with as much affection as could be reaſonably expected from a man of his diſpoſition. I have only to lament, that, in chuſing a huſband for me, he did not think it neceſſary to conſult the freedom and inclinations of my heart.

" The gentleman for whom he deſigned me derives his deſcent from a very ancient, rich, and noble family; but a high born paſſion for expence, which had been regularly tranſmitted from one anceſtor to another, had been indulged to ſo extravagant a degree by the father of young Arthur (for ſo at preſent I ſhall call my intended huſband), that a fortune once equal to all the

ſplendid

ſplendid luxuries of life, was now become barely ſufficient to procure its comforts.—To ſubdue the hereditary habits of extravagance, in the midſt of ſurrounding temptations, required more courage than Arthur's father poſſeſſed; and he ſoon beheld himſelf, with an amiable wife and two lovely children, plunged, by his fatal miſconduct, into all the horrors of penury and want.—Sighing for the irretrievable paſt, and tormented by that remorſe which at ſome period or other riſes the awful chaſtiſer of the children of error, he at length fell a prey to his feelings, and left his family to ſtruggle through the poverty which his imprudent ſpirit had occaſioned. Heaven, however, regarded theſe innocent orphans with an eye of pity; and, in the perſon of a diſtant relation of the ſame name with the deceaſed, unexpectedly afforded them a patron and protector.

protector. The caprices of fortune had beſtowed upon this relation the luxury of riches; but nature had denied to him the talent of enjoying them with advantage; and he maintained through life the inſipid mediocrity of character in which neither virtue nor vice predominates.

"At the period of which I am now ſpeaking, he had juſt attained the age when the epithet of Old Bachelor is ſarcaſtically beſtowed; but, inſtead of wiſhing to retrieve himſelf from the obloquy of that character, he congratulated himſelf on the good fortune which had ſaved him from the cares, croſſes, and vexations, which, he concluded, were unavoidably entailed upon the matrimonial ſtate; and, though he often wiſhed to tranſmit his name with honour to poſterity, he could not think of ſacrificing the quiet of his life to the gratification of his

his wiſh. The charms of beauty, as Sir Pertinax Mac Sycophant ſays, might have ſmote againſt his heart, but no admiſſion would he give them: he thought, like the poet, that they might ſoon grow familiar to the lover, fade in his eye, and pall upon his ſenſe; and the phantom vaniſhed from his thought when he placed it in competition with his imaginary happineſs. Under theſe ſentiments, the family of his deceaſed relation preſented to his mind an opportunity of enjoying the conſolations of domeſtic ſociety, without the riſk of nuptial vexation; and he adopted the reſolution of taking them under his roof, and of educating young Arthur in ſuch a manner as to render him worthy of the fortune he intended to leave him.

"The genius of Arthur ſeized with avidity every opportunity which a very liberal education

cation afforded him, to improve the gifts which nature had munificently beſtowed upon his mind; and I cannot diſſemble that he is a young man highly accompliſhed, and every way calculated to charm the eye with admiration, and the heart with love. The moſt romantic virtue need not ſeek for a purer mind; nor imagination deſire to behold a form more elegantly finiſhed."

Francis looked a little diſconcerted at this warm panegyric on the character of a rival, and attempted to draw away his hand from Maria's; but ſhe gently detained it, adding with a very ſignificant ſmile—"But there is no accounting for the ſource of affection. He does not, with all his merits, pleaſe my taſte; and, perhaps, I may be thought ſingular," added ſhe, looking ſlily at Francis, "in the choice I have made."

"The

" The protector of Arthur and the uncle of Maria had been very intimately acquainted with each other from their earlieſt infancy; and the correſpondent ſimilarity of their characters and fortunes contributed to eſtabliſh the cloſeſt connection and intercourſe between them. The two families frequently ſpent, at different periods, many months with each other, and appeared like different branches of the ſame ſtock. During one of theſe viſits, a very large eſtate on the borders of Scotland was advertiſed to be ſold. The two old friends conceived the idea of purchaſing it between them; and this idea firſt inſpired the reſolution of uniting Arthur and myſelf in matrimony. The eſtate was purchaſed; and our reſpective protectors, without conſulting our inclinations, entered into an agreement, the terms of which

which were ſubſtantially as follow: 'That the eſtate ſhould become the joint property of Arthur and myſelf, upon condition that we intermarried; but that the firſt who oppoſed the connection ſhould entirely forfeit their claim to any part, and the eſtate ſhould wholly and ſolely remain to the other party.'

The terms of this agreement, calculated for the meridian of ſlavery, were ill ſuited to produce their intended effect. Cultivated minds cannot bear the tyranny of reſtraint. The paſſions are independent agents, and ill brook the ſway of arbitrary power, or whimſical caprice; and I muſt candidly acknowledge, there was ſuch a perverſeneſs in my diſpoſition, that from the moment I knew that Arthur was *deſtined* for me, I thought him much leſs amiable than he had before appeared. Whenever he oppoſed me in the ſlighteſt inſtance, my jealous mind

concluded that he was already uſurping the deſpotic ill-nature of a huſband; and I reſented, with indignation, the premature controul.

" He ſoon after engaged in a profeſſion which frequently called him into different parts of England; and as he ſeldom returned to Scotland, except to viſit his mother and ſiſter, I had very few opportunities of learning his ſentiments upon the ſubject of our intended union, and for that reaſon I cannot imagine that he was very well pleaſed with it. In the courſe of a ſhort time his protector died; an event which rendered his mother and ſiſter altogether dependent upon him, and wholly within his power; and, whatever may be the ſentiments which he entertained reſpecting me, the tenderneſs and attention of his behaviour towards them, convinces me that he poſſeſſes a noble mind,

mind, not unworthy my admiration and eſteem.

" My uncle paid the laſt ſad debt of nature two years ago, and left me under the care of a guardian; a croſs, captious, obſtinate old miſer, who prognoſticated my utter ruin whenever I purchaſed a ribbon; wearied me continually about performing the contract with young Arthur; and extolled my uncle's wiſdom in ſaving me from deſtruction, by leaving me under his care.

" To increaſe my tortures, he had a ſiſter who lived in the houſe with him, an——" Here Miſs Douglas recollected there was an old maid in the room, and checked herſelf in time.

" She was the moſt peeviſh ſplenetic creature exiſting; and being at perpetual diſcord with herſelf, could not bear to ſee any one happy. She was fearful of my going

going out leſt I ſhould be amuſed, or of my being in retirement leſt I ſhould be quiet. She would not ſuffer me to read, becauſe ſtudy tranquillized the mind; and once when I was extremely ill, and beſought her to bring me one of my books which ſhe had locked up, ſhe gave me a hideous volume of cookery; and, "grinning horribly a ghaſtly ſmile," told me that Arthur would be much more obliged to her for making me peruſe ſuch treatiſes, than ſuffering me to read filthy novels."

"What a depraved taſte!" cried Miſs Margaret; how aſtoniſhingly vulgar! I am amazed, Madam, that you had patience with her."

"Patience, you know, ſiſter," ſaid the Vicar, "as I have deſcanted upon it in a little eſſay on the cardinal virtues, is one of the chief auxiliaries to human fortitude; and

and without a conſiderable portion of it, I dare ſay the ſituation of Miſs Douglas with ſuch a ſplenetic old maid, would have been intolerable."

"I will not, my dear Sir," replied Maria, "take too much merit to myſelf; I really believe I bore my ſituation with very little philoſophy; but I was forced by neceſſity to make myſelf content. And although I received great ſupport under my afflictions from the natural ſtrength and vivacity of my ſpirits, yet, to avoid the appearance of being hurt by her behaviour, I frequently aſſumed an air of cheerfulneſs when my heart was ſinking in ſadneſs.

"The union with Arthur, of which both my guardians continually reminded me, grew more and more unpleaſant to my mind whenever I recollected the reſtraint which the cauſe of it laid upon the natural freedom

of the heart. While this diſagreeable proſpect of an union with Arthur occupied my mind, I had the happineſs to ſee your ſon; and from that moment I have thought of it with horror; for——But explanations are unneceſſary."

"Yes, indeed," ſaid Francis, with a conſcious ſmile.

"A few days before my arrival here, I received a letter from Arthur, informing me that he was preparing to ſet off for Edinburgh, to claim the performance of the marriage contract. The intelligence diſtracted me; and knowing the perſecution I ſhould ſuffer from thoſe with whom I reſided, in caſe I made the ſlighteſt oppoſition, I determined to take a ſtep to which, while inevitable neceſſity urged me, my judgment, my delicacy, and my apprehenſions were very far from giving any ſanction.

I made

I made the attempt. I ſucceeded in my elopement; and I have thrown myſelf upon your goodneſs for protection. The extended character of your benevolence prompted the fond hope that I ſhould find an aſylum under your roof; and I have not been miſtaken. The unbounded gratitude which my heart feels for the parental tenderneſs with which you have pardoned my raſhneſs, and protected me, time alone muſt reveal; for I feel it is beyond the power of language to expreſs.

" I have written to the gentleman whoſe real name I have deſignedly concealed under the appellation of Arthur. A native generoſity of ſoul, a nobleneſs of mind which I think he poſſeſſes, will, I hope, incline him to divide with me our protector's bounty, without demanding performance of the odious condition with which it is clog-

ged. If he will not, the concealment of his name may ſhelter him from open diſgrace; but the poſſeſſion of worlds ſhall never induce me to become his wife. I ſhall yield up my portion of the eſtate with an indignant contempt of his meanneſs and his avarice, and willingly embrace the poverty and ruin to which it will reduce me. But think not, Sir, that I ſhall in that event preſume any further upon your generoſity and friendſhip. No; with a ſteady reliance on the protection of Providence, I ſhall commit myſelf to the exertions of induſtry for ſupport. The real neceſſities of nature will eaſily be ſupplied; and I here moſt ſolemnly declare, in the preſence of you all, that, if I cannot bring a fortune to my Francis, he ſhall never be involved in the ſmalleſt difficulty or diſtreſs upon my account."

The

The tears trickled down the glowing cheeks of Maria in great abundance, as ſhe uttered this ſolemn proteſtation; but Francis caught her with rapture to his arms, and exclaimed—"Oh Maria! my life muſt be miſerable without you. Think not ſo meanly of my love, as to imagine it is influenced by the paltry conſideration of riches. I love you for yourſelf alone. With you I ſhall be ſupremely bleſſed; but without you no degree of affluence can procure me comfort."

The Vicar roſe involuntarily from his chair; and preſſing Maria to his heart, embraced her with great affection.—"I admire the liberality of my ſon's ſentiments," he exclaimed, "and I applaud the generoſity of your's. The arrogant daughters of proſperity fade into inſignificance, before a young woman who bears with meekneſs the

preſſure of affliction. The partial fondneſs of a parent may, perhaps, have made me entertain ambitious views for my ſon—views which his ſituation did not authorize; but I ſee my folly, and am determined to rectify it. We muſt wait the reſult of the letter you have written to the gentleman. Let him, if he is ſo ſelfiſh, quietly keep your fortune; and let him, if he can, be happy. Oh! how much more enviable will the ſtate of my Francis be, when I give to his arms the child of innocence, the orphan of virtue—a woman of purity, whoſe price is far above rubies! There is no crime in your refuſing to fulfil the contract. In making it, your relations uſurped a power which they had no right to aſſume. Providence could never intend that reaſon, inclination, all the fine and noble faculties of the human ſoul, ſhould be counteracted by the dictates

tates of avarice, the deſigns of ambition, the caprice of tyranny, or the ſordid ſentiments of imaginary convenience. Take her, my boy, take her; and may Heaven ſanctify with felicity your mutual paſſion!"

Francis caught her in tranſport to his arms.—"Oh, my father!" he cried; but joy rendered his utterance inarticulate; a burſt of correſpondent emotions locked up the powers of Miſs Douglas's ſpeech; ſhe leaned upon her Francis's breaſt, and ſhed a deluge of ecſtatic tears.

Roſina was deeply affected. The ſilent evidence of Lydia's feelings appeared in her eyes. The joy of Miſs Margaret was ſo great, that, in riſing from her chair, in the warmth of congratulation, ſhe trod upon a little favourite kitten that was playing round her feet. At this moment Suſan entered the

room, to inform Miſs Margaret the apple-pie was baked; and the good lady inſtantly uſhered them into the parlour; where they ranged themſelves round a table, at which all the harmony of content and feſtivity preſided.

Roſina warbled a ſong which Sedgeley had compoſed on the vagrancy of a butterfly; and Miſs Margaret deſcanted on the abſurdity of his ideas in not liking Novels.

The Vicar's heart fully juſtified him in the countenance he had given to the paſſion of Francis and Maria. To reſcue a young, helpleſs, amiable girl from the cruelty of impending perſecution, appeared to him to be an indiſpenſable duty. He reſolved, however, to wait the event of the gentleman's reſolution, before he gave his ultimate aſſent to complete the wiſhes of the youthful pair.

In

The retired ſcenes of nature have a thouſand charms that tranquillize the mind, and ſoften the aſperity of internal ſorrow. Maria and Lydia experienced their influence when, riſing early, they retired to a favourite grove; and while the ſoft breath of the morning played around them, they anticipated the felicity, of which there was every reaſon to hope the former would ſoon be in poſſeſſion.

CHAP. IV.

A MYSTERY.

THE anſwer to the letter which Miſs Douglas had written for the purpoſe of defeating the harſh and tyrannic condition of the *betrothing contract*, at length arrived;—but the ſtudied ſecrecy with which ſhe concealed its contents from all the family, gave a very rational alarm to their minds, and convinced them that the propoſal of relinquiſhment was rejected. The Vicar thought himſelf entitled to her confidence, and felt conſiderable

conſiderable mortification at her ſilence;—but his offended pride prevented him from opening his lips to her upon the ſubject.—The other parts of the family, indeed, particularly Miſs Margaret, threw out continual ſnares to entrap Maria into an explanation; but ſhe was too much upon her guard to be betrayed; and even Francis himſelf was only partially made acquainted with the anſwer ſhe had received. She aſſumed a very grave and thoughtful air; ſaid ſhe expected a gentleman would call upon her early the enſuing morning; requeſted that ſhe might have the uſe of the parlour to herſelf when he arrived, and left the family to the uncertainty of vague conjecture on the cauſe of her myſterious behaviour.

They had ſcarcely finiſhed their breakfaſt the enſuing morning, when a carriage drove to the door, and Maria flew, with

precipitation, to the parlour, to receive the viſitor. Curioſity, the moſt powerful motive of the human mind, induced the girls and Miſs Margaret to peep from the windows above ſtairs, in hopes of diſcovering who this viſitor could be; but they received no other gratification than to obſerve a gentleman muffled up in a great coat, with his hat flapped over his face, and a handkerchief at his mouth, alight ſuddenly from the carriage, and enter the houſe. This appearance of concealment increaſed their curioſity; but as there was no means of ſatisfying it, they were forced to remain for ſome hours tortured by ſuſpenſe. At length a meſſage came to requeſt the Vicar's immediate preſence in the parlour; and at the ſame inſtant the carriage was heard to drive away. The heart of Francis bounded at the ſound.

The

The Vicar obeyed the ſummons, and deſcended to the parlour. He found Maria alone. Her whole form appeared uncommonly animated. A glow of evident pleaſure beamed through the diſorder of her features, and overſpread her cheeks. Her looks ſhed a humid luſtre through the ſtarting tears which ſparkled in her eyes.—Her hands were alternately raiſed and claſped, and then preſſed againſt her boſom, which throbbed with emotions that language would but faintly expreſs.

The Vicar had continued for ſome moments in the room before ſhe obſerved that he was preſent. On diſcovering him, ſhe flew, with rapture, to his arms, and exclaimed, "Oh, Sir, all is ſettled! He is the moſt noble, the moſt generous of men. He has releaſed me from all obligations, and has given me an opportunity of rewarding, though

though in an imperfect manner, the merits of the object I adore. Have you, Sir, ſeriouſly deliberated on what you ſaid the other night? Have you repented of your promiſe? Do you fear to truſt the happineſs of your ſon to one who has been guilty of ſo imprudent a ſtep? or, do you ſtill think me worthy the name of your child?"

"He does! he muſt!" exclaimed Francis, who, having from an involuntary impulſe, followed the footſteps of his father, now ruſhed into the room; "My Maria! my love! my darling!"

The Vicar was unable to ſpeak. He took their hands; he joined them; he preſſed them to his boſom; and Maria and Francis were folded for ſome moments in each other's arms, in all the ſpeechleſs ecſtacy of joy.

The ladies made their appearance from above ſtairs, and nothing was heard but ſounds of joy and gratulation. Miſs Margaret very affectionately embraced her niece that was to be, and declared that ſhe always thought it would be a match.

After the tumults of pleaſure had, in ſome degree, ſubſided;—"My lovely children," exclaimed the Vicar, "the felicity of your hearts is now made perfect, and every circumſtance of your approaching union promiſes its duration and increaſe; but recollect that proſperity is equally with adverſity, the teſt of virtue: while the latter, like a nipping froſt, blights every paſſion ere it riſes into bloſſom, the former, like the genial ſun, draws up o'erwhelming weeds amidſt the faireſt flowers. Let not the intoxications of felicity render you forgetful of the divine ſource from whence alone

alone it ſprings. Still let the heaving ſigh of miſery and want find free admiſſion to your hearts. Suffer the gentle tear of pity to lead you from the manſion of peace to the hut of ſorrow; and while the rays of ſweet benevolence caſt the brighteſt beam of virtue round your actions, let not the deſires of pride and oſtentation corrupt the chaſte and ſimple goodneſs of your ſouls.—True virtue is its own reward, and diſdains the meed of treacherous applauſe. Retrench the ſuperfluities of life, and repleniſh with them the ſcanty or exhauſted board of penury, and you will give a value to your wealth, a ſplendour to your exiſtence, which gay extravagance can never purchaſe. Catch as they riſe the lamentations of diſtreſs, and endeavour to convert the groans of wretchedneſs into ſongs of gladneſs. Feed the mouth of hunger with the cates of plenty.—

Soften

Soften the ſadneſs of the widowed heart.—Wipe away the tear from the pale orphan's cheek. This is luxury! rapture! ecſtacy! It ennobles the mind, and exalts the faireſt characters. On works like theſe the pureſt miniſters of Heaven look down with admiration and delight. Theſe are the joys which render earth our paradiſe. Rapturous, indeed, is the cloſe of that man's life who has performed ſuch noble actions. He paſſes through the darkneſs of the grave to mingle with the ſons of light. The ſod which covers his remains is watered by the grateful tears of thoſe his goodneſs has relieved. His memory is immortal.—He receives from recording angels his beſt applauſe, and reſts for ever in the glorious ſtate prepared above for benign charity and exalted virtue."

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

THE MYSTERY UNRAVELLED.

THE Vicar having poured forth the joy of his heart in moral admonition, Maria requeſted, in a very ſignificant manner, that he would favour her for a few moments with a private audience; and, withdrawing her hand from Francis, led him into an adjoining room. This requeſt gave birth to the appearance of a new myſtery. Curioſity was again excited to learn the reaſon of an interview for which there was no apparent cauſe, and

and the family waited with great anxiety for the reſult of the conference. They were not long abſent. On re-entering the room, Maria, as if in continued converſation with the Vicar, ſaid aloud—"You find, Sir, the favour he expects from me, in return for the generoſity of his conduct; and I cannot think that ſhe will refuſe to aſſiſt me in diſcharging this debt of gratitude."

"Margaret," cried the Vicar, rubbing his hands, and chucking her under the chin, "what did you dream of laſt night?—Had you any *omens* foreboding more than one marriage in the family?"

Roſina and Lydia diſcovered ſome emotions upon hearing this queſtion; they ſtarted, coloured, and betrayed great confuſion.

"More than one marriage in the family!" replied Miſs Margaret; "What do you mean?

mean? But now I recollect, I really did dream of two coffins laſt night."

"Yes, Madam," cried Maria; but they certainly were for Francis and myſelf; and except you can prove——"

"Lydia," ſaid the Vicar, interrupting his daughter elect, "you don't look ſprightly to-day. What is the matter with you?—What are your ſentiments of the approaching nuptials?"

"Sir," replied Lydia, "you cannot doubt but that they afford me a conſiderable degree of pleaſure."

"Aye, to be ſure they muſt," ſaid the Vicar; "but would you not be much better pleaſed if thoſe nuptials were your own? Come, tell me the truth."

"Pray, Sir," cried Maria, "don't keep her any longer in ſuſpenſe. You muſt know, my dear Lydia, that you have captivated

vated the heart of a certain gentleman, no other than my diſcarded ſwain; who, inſtead of lamenting my cruelty, or dancing, like *Mad Tom*, on the brink of a precipice, or wailing in a lonely deſart, like a melancholy derviſe, has had the preſumption to declare that he is equally rejoiced with me in deſtroying the contract which I feared would bar my happineſs; and in return for his conſent to cancel it, has peremptorily inſiſted on my pleading his cauſe with you."

"Surely," ſaid Lydia, "no one will be ſo ridiculous as to plead for a perſon whom I never ſaw."

"I am really that ridiculous girl," cried Miſs Douglas; "and, until he appears, you cannot tell whether you have ever ſeen him or not. He, you know, may have ſeen you many times, while you have been walking, dancing, and upon many other occaſions."

"From

"From the account that Miſs Douglas has given me of him," interpoſed the Vicar, "he is, my dear Lydia, a moſt unexceptionable character; and although I have always been averſe to laying the ſmalleſt conſtraint on the inclinations of my children in forming matrimonial connections, I think it the indiſpenſable duty of a parent to point out a proper object, and ſignify his wiſh and approbation in the choice."

"Oh, Sir!" replied Lydia, turning pale, and laying her hand on his, "mention it not again, I beſeech you."

"What is the reaſon of this violent agitation, Lydia?" exclaimed the Vicar. "How can you object to a perſon whom you acknowledge you have never ſeen?"

"Oh, Sir!" ſhe replied, "probe not my heart by ſuch queſtions. I deſire not to change my ſtate. I am very happy as I am;

am; very content. Do not, Oh do not! I beſeech you, my dear father, torture your child, by urging her to enter upon cares which the finds herſelf unequal to fulfil."

"Lydia," ſaid the Vicar, "you have hurt me exceedingly; you ſeem to diſregard the purity of truth. Do you imagine that I am ſo ignorant of human nature as to believe that any young woman is without a wiſh to ſee herſelf happily ſettled? that a ſolitary, forlorn, and ſingle ſtate, has not many terrors which affright her mind—a ſtate which, however cruelly and unjuſtly, is ſo much ridiculed by the world? Let not any woman pretend to ſay, that the name of *wife* has not more charms than that of *old maid*—a uſeleſs member of ſociety."

The Vicar unfortunately forgot his ſiſter was in the room.

"Upon my word, I am much obliged to you, Sir," ſaid Miſs Margaret. "Very pretty, indeed! Uſeleſs, forſooth! I who have managed your family, who have comforted you in all your troubles, who have educated your children—Uſeleſs!—Well, it is no matter. I ſuppoſe Mr. Sedgeley has lent you his Eſſay on Old Maids; but let me tell you, brother, people may ſometimes be old maids from choice. You can't have forgot——you know very well——"

She confuſed herſelf ſo much by her paſſion, that ſhe could not proceed, and began, in great agitation, to plait the folds of her ruffle.

Francis endeavoured to ſuppreſs his riſing laugh by affecting a cough; and Maria fiddled with her glove till ſhe tore it. It was fortunate that Miſs Margaret did not perceive them; for, if ſhe had, ſhe would certainly

certainly have refuſed her culinary aſſiſtance in preparing the wedding dinner.

The exacerbation of Miſs Ouſeley's paſſion was altogether diſregarded by the Vicar. He was ſuch a warm lover of truth, that the moſt trivial deviation from it hurt his feelings; and he was ſeriouſly diſpleaſed with the ſeeming diſingenuity of his daughter's declaration.

"What," ſaid he, reſuming his diſcourſe, "can be ſo laudable in a young woman as a deſire to be happily ſettled? Though the gentleman who has made propoſals for you, poſſeſſes a fortune far above what you have any reaſon to expect, it would not have induced me to approve of his paſſion, if I was not convinced of the purity and rectitude of his character. I cannot ſuggeſt any rational objection that you can poſſibly

entertain againſt this alliance, except, indeed, a pre-engagement."

Lydia, conſcious of the truth of this obſervation, bluſhed with confuſion; and averting her head, endeavoured to hide the acknowledgment from her father's obſervation.

"I am afraid that you have not been candid with me, Lydia," continued the Vicar; "you know beſt whether I have merited your confidence."

"Deareſt Sir," ſaid ſhe, almoſt ſinking with confuſion, "do not diſtreſs me by ſpeaking of this connection."

"Only conſent to ſee the gentleman, my dear girl," ſaid Maria.

"It is, I think, very cruel in you, Miſs Douglas," ſhe replied, "ſo unfeelingly to urge an interview when you ſee my ſituation."

"Lydia,"

"Lydia," exclaimed the Vicar, angrily, "you know that I have ever been anxious to anticipate and gratify every wiſh of your heart; gratitude ſhould afford me a return of kindneſs: unleſs, therefore, you can aſſign ſome reaſon for your reluctance to comply with this requeſt, I ſhall think your refuſing to ſee the gentleman ariſes from a perverſe and obſtinate diſpoſition."

Lydia, overcome by the ſeverity of her father's animadverſion, was unable to make any reply. She had concealed the attachment which her heart had fondly cheriſhed for Manning, from a parent whoſe kindneſs and affection had entitled him to her fulleſt confidence; and the ungracious light in which the acknowledgment of her latent paſſion would now appear in, contributed to impoſe the ſilence ſhe maintained. She felt, however, with painful ſolicitude, the inextri-

cable dilemma to which it reduced her. To admit the addreſſes of her new lover in excluſion of her paſſion for Manning, by complying with her father's requeſt, or to incur his ſerious diſpleaſure by a pertinacious refuſal, without aſſigning a reaſon for her diſobedience, were equally tormenting. This perplexity excited perturbations in her mind too violent to endure. A ſtream of ſilent tears diſcovered the anguiſh of her heart; her drooping head ſunk upon her beating boſom; and the rival claims of duty and affection engroſſed every faculty of her diſtracted mind.

"Oh pray, Sir," cried Roſina to her father, "do not diſtreſs my ſiſter by further ſolicitations."

"No, brother," exclaimed Miſs Margaret, inpity for her niece, "I conjure you not to perſecute her any longer with unavailing

availing requeſts. You perceive her reluctance is unconquerable. Give the gentleman a deciſive anſwer; but ſoften it as much as poſſible, ſince I know how intolerable a diſappointment of this nature muſt be to a heart of tenderneſs."

"Nay then," exclaimed Maria with great emphaſis, "I ſhall plead his cauſe no longer."——As ſhe ſpoke theſe words, ſhe opened the door of the adjoining parlour.

Lydia gently raiſed her tearful eyes towards it. She ſtarted ſuddenly from her trance, and ſhrieked.—Her feeble frame was unable to endure the conflict; and ſhe muſt have fallen, in agitation, to the ground, had ſhe not been timely ſaved by the ſupporting arms of—Manning himſelf!!

He claſped her in his arms—ſhe fainted on his breaſt; but language is unable to deſcribe the mutual feelings which ſeemed to agitate

their ſouls. The countenance of Manning changed alternately in quick ſucceſſion from livid paleneſs to the deepeſt red. Lydia at length recovered; and, raiſing her head, articulated a few incoherent expreſſions. Manning whiſpered a reply.

During the converſation which paſſed between them, "I entreat you, Sir," ſaid Miſs Douglas aloud to the Vicar, "not to urge your daughter any more to a connection ſo very repugnant to her inclinations. Pray don't diſtreſs her by requiring her to enter upon cares which ſhe finds herſelf unable to fulfil. Diſmiſs the gentleman by a deciſive anſwer."

"Diſmiſs me!" cried Manning; "no, no, I will not relinquiſh the happineſs I have gained. Thus I preſs the lovely charmer to my heart; its firſt, its only, its eternal love; thus I claim my dear, my

lovely

lovely Lydia, as my deſtined wife. What cares, what duties is ſhe not capable of fulfilling? What ſtation can exiſt which her matchleſs virtues would not dignify? With a ſoul ſuited to the humbleſt ſtate, or higheſt rank of life, what ſituation can there be which would not derive its brighteſt luſtre from her charms?"

A glance from the truly eloquent eyes of Lydia finely expreſſed the ſweet emotions of her ſoul, as ſhe gently diſengaged herſelf from Manning's arms.

"May Heaven bleſs you!" cried the Vicar, laying hold of both their hands, and joining them. "May Heaven bleſs you, and render your felicity perfect and ſecure! Take her; I give her to you with joy: ſhe is only rich in virtue; but if ſhe diſcharges the obligations of a wife with the ſame merit that ſhe has performed the duties of a

daughter, you will have no reaſon to complain.

Manning was, at length, invited up ſtairs, and introduced to Francis: they embraced with affectionate tenderneſs; but, for very obvious reaſons, they examined each other's character with the moſt critical attention. A ſhort time, however, produced reciprocal dilection in their boſoms, indicative of the pureſt friendſhip.

The perſonal elegance of Manning never appeared more captivating than it did at preſent. The ſpirited brilliancy of his eyes was tempered by the gentle ſoftneſs of his ſoul. The dazzling animation of his countenance derived new luſtre from the diſorder of his features. The charming eaſe of his manners correſponded with the elegance of his dreſs. Lydia gazed upon him with ſilent delight; and forgetting that it dero-

gated

gated from her brother's charms, wondered how Miſs Douglas could reſiſt the force of ſuch united excellence. The idea gave her ſome little pain; it implied that his merits were not irreſiſtible; and ſhe could not help expreſſing to Roſina, during the evening, that Maria certainly wanted ſenſibility, or poſſeſſed a very ſingular and extraordinary taſte.

"I am very much obliged to you, my good ſiſter, for that obſervation," cried Francis, overhearing the remark; "but you may, perhaps with reaſon, arraign Maria's choice."

"Take care, Lydia," interpoſed Miſs Douglas with vivacity, "that you do not convince me of my error too ſoon. Recollect that Manning and myſelf are yet at liberty. We may be perſuaded to

change our minds, and ſtill reſume the contract."

"Oh! never name that fooliſh contract any more," ſaid Manning; "the exiſtence of it has given more pain to my mind than you perhaps imagine; and I think you the moſt generous girl alive for agreeing to deſtroy it."

"Come, come, Captain Manning," anſwered Maria, "let not either of us aſſume peculiar merit upon that occaſion. Both of us acted from intereſted motives, not from generoſity; and our own happineſs was the ſole conſideration."

"May you ever feel that happineſs in its utmoſt extent!" exclaimed Francis, preſſing her hand to his lips.

"When I quitted Lanſdowne," continued Manning, "I was diſtracted by the contending claims of love and honour. Lydia poſſeſſed

poſſeſſed the abſolute ſovereignty of my heart; and I thought, from ſentiments of gratitude to my benefactor, that you, Maria, was entitled to my hand. The ſtruggles of my mind were great and agonizing, but honour gained the victory over love; and as I had no idea of your averſion to perform the conditions of the contract, I wrote the letter which occaſioned your elopement: and I wrote it in the warmeſt terms, becauſe I was unwilling to diſtreſs, by the appearance of indifference, the feelings of a good young woman, whom I thought myſelf obliged to marry."

"Oh, pray, my *good Sir!*" replied Maria, "don't call me *good young woman.* The ſtyle of expreſſion conveys an obloquy; it imparts an idea of that flat, ſtupid, and inſipid character which is uſually deſcribed by *good ſort of young woman.* I cannot endure it;

but you may call me *amiable*, if you pleaſe, or any thing but that."

"Well then," replied Manning, "the idea of being obliged to unite myſelf even with a pleaſing, attractive, excellent, deſerving, amiable, charming—in ſhort, every thing but *good*—young woman, while my heart was ſo entirely devoted to another, gave very ſerious diſquietude to my mind; but I was fearful of expoſing my indifference to her, to whom I imagined my hand was indiſſolubly engaged. It is certainly true that the performance of the condition was optional, and the one of two gratifications was open to my choice; but beſides conceiving that I was bound in honour to carry the apparent wiſhes of my benefactor into effect, I had the powerful conſiderations of humanity to controul my choice. The profits which I derived from the eſtate, was all

all I had in the world. A widowed mother and an affectionate ſiſter were wholly dependant on me for their ſupport; if I had incurred the forfeiture, they muſt have wanted bread. Theſe were cogent motives to influence my mind; but the inclinations of my heart kept, for a long time, the conflict doubtful. Honour and humanity at length prevailed, and perſuaded me to ſacrifice my own enjoyments to promote the happineſs of others. Time, I hoped, would enable me to repreſs the tumults of my heart; and I reſolutely determined to perform the contract. To forget Lydia I found was impoſſible; but I acknowledge that the idea of rendering the declining period of a widowed parent's days comfortable and happy, induced me to abandon all hope of attaining my preſent felicity."

"Oh

"Oh noble, generous youth!" cried the Vicar, overcome by the liberality of Manning's ſentiments. "But virtue," continued he, "will ever meet with its reward."

"Now acknowledge truly, Captain Manning," aſked Miſs Douglas, "were not your pride and vanity a little mortified when you heard that I had eloped on purpoſe to avoid you?"

"No really," replied Manning; "inſtead of mortification, I felt a glow of pleaſure. Hope opened proſpects to my mind of being releaſed from my embarraſſment. I admired your ſpirit; and if ever you could have rivalled Lydia in my eſteem, it muſt have been at that moment. But I acknowledge that I was ſurpriſed at the event; becauſe your guardian had informed me you were anxious for the match."

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The converſation which this *denouement* occaſioned, was continued with alternate ſerioufneſs and vivacity until dinner was announced; where the extraordinary exertions of Miſs Margaret's catering talents appeared very conſpicuous in the hoſpitality of the board. The afternoon was paſſed in ſongs of gladneſs, and in ſentiments of delight. Mirth and merriment ſanctified a thouſand fooleries, which, in a graver moment, would have appeared ridiculous. Joy reigned in every breaſt; and, excepting one or two, the day never cloſed upon a happier ſet of beings than thoſe who were now aſſembled at the Vicarage.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXIII.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF LEVITY.

IT has, perhaps, already ſuggeſted itſelf to the reader's mind, that the two perſons whoſe hearts felt a tincture of diſcontent at the approaching nuptials, could be no other than the fretful aunt and her diſappointed niece. Miſs Margaret could not digeſt the circumſtance of Lydia being married before her elder ſiſter; and Roſina, with deep regret, reflected that it was in all probability

probability her folly alone which had excluded her from approaching the altar in the bands of Hymen with her brother and ſiſter. That Melford loved her with an enthuſiaſtic paſſion ſhe was well convinced; and, on reviewing the egregious levity with which ſhe had behaved towards him, ſhe ceaſed to wonder that the warm and volatile diſpoſition of his mind ſhould have miſled his virtue. While her perſonal charms had inſpired his breaſt with the warmeſt love, the miſtaken idea which her miſconduct had raiſed of her character, precluded his eſteem; and ſhe dreaded leſt the concluſions of his mind ſhould, in time, eradicate the affections of his heart. It was natural, ſhe thought, that a man of ſenſe and underſtanding ſhould wiſh to eſcape the trammels of coquetry; and ſhe was aſſured that if ſhe had maintained a proper dignity in her conduct, he would

would never have preſumed to encroach upon the bounds of decorum. If ſhe had cultivated his good opinion and eſteem to the ſame extent that ſhe had gained his love, ſhe flattered herſelf that he would before now have made honourable propoſals to her; and, like the reſt of her family, ſhe might at this moment have beheld proſpects of increaſing felicity riſe upon her view; but her mad career of folly had, in all probability, alarmed his mind, deprived her for ever of happineſs, and incurred, perhaps, the hatred of the only man with whom ſhe could enjoy that ecſtatic interchange of ſoul,

"Where thought meets thought ere from the lips it part,
"And each warm wiſh ſprings mutual from the heart."

POPE.

Theſe mortifying reflections agonized her ſoul, and filled her eyes with tears of the bittereſt anguiſh.

Such

Such are the conſequences, Oh ye daughters of Levity! which, at ſome period or other, will ever flow from your unthinking conduct: and happy are ye, indeed, if, like Roſina, your errors fortunately eſcape the impending horrors of attendant guilt. Remorſe will follow diſappointment; and the ſighs of ſorrow, the tears of penitence, cannot recal your paſt indiſcretions. If, however, they flow from the pure and unadulterated ſource of true conviction—if the heart, untainted by vice, ſeeks unaffectedly to amend its errors, and to reform its feelings, your ſighs and tears ſhall ſtop the voice of ſatire, and change the noiſe of cenſure into ſounds of praiſe. Triumphant virtue ſhall recommend the returning child of error to her own eſteem, and re-eſtabliſh her character with the worthy and the wiſe.

Amidſt

Amidſt the tumults of Roſina's mind envy bore no ſhare. She lamented the misfortunes which her follies had occaſioned; but ſhe rejoiced, with pure and unaffected cordiality, at her ſiſter's happineſs. Miſs Margaret, however, did not ſo candidly diſtinguiſh; and ſhe would willingly have placed Roſina at the altar in the ſtead of Lydia. The warm hopes which ſhe had long cheriſhed of ſeeing her favourite niece firſt married, were diſappointed: Melford had deſerted the field; and the country in which they lived, did not afford a great variety of game for the matrimonial net. Like a provident patroneſs, therefore, ſhe began to turn her ſerious thoughts towards young Sedgeley; and, although ſhe had never given much encouragement to his addreſſes to her niece, ſhe thought, with proper management, he might be rendered a tole-

rable

rable match; and ſhe immediately reſolved to adviſe Roſina not to neglect the preſent opportunity.

"I admit," ſaid Miſs Margaret, as ſhe walked down the garden with Roſina the ſame afternoon, "I admit that he is not quite ſo much the thing as Captain Melford; but, in proper hands, he may be greatly improved. You ſhall have all the aſſiſtance that I can afford you to manage him. A few unhappy prejudices are his chief foibles; diveſt him of them, and he is really a handſome, genteel, ſenſible, agreeable young man. You know that he adores you, and that his father can give him a very good income. You had better follow my advice; take him, and be married on the ſame day with your brother and ſiſter. I make no doubt but that, at his father's death, you will be enabled to rattle in your carriage."

Roſina,

Roſina, at firſt, violently rejected Miſs Margaret's advice; but her repeated arguments, and the growing happineſs, buſtle, congratulations, and merriment of the reſt of the family, after ſome reflection, ſeemed to make an impreſſion on her mind. She did not diſlike Sedgeley, ſhe ſaid; and yet ſhe did not love him. She wiſhed to gratify the inclinations of her friends; and her proſpect of regaining Melford was hopeleſs and forlorn.—Her aunt left her to deliberate upon this ſubject; and ſhe had almoſt come to a reſolution to conquer, if it were poſſible, the inclinations of her heart, when her ſiſter Lydia, running with eagerneſs to her, ſaid that ſhe had juſt had a long converſation with Manning concerning his friend Melford, and that he had aſſured her his heart was ſtill fondly attached to Roſina.

This intelligence effectually put to flight all her ideas in favour of poor Sedgeley, and rekindled every dying hope within her heart. The rapturous thought of ſtill being dear to Melford gave new animation to her ſoul; ſhe re-examined her feelings; ſhe found them inviolably attached to him; and ſhe was only aſtoniſhed how ſhe could for a moment think of liſtening to the addreſſes of another.

Miſs Margaret was extremely diſſatisfied with Roſina's determination to give up Sedgeley, until ſhe acquainted her with what Lydia had imparted. The old lady, with wonderful verſatility, immediately changed her ſentiments; and poor Sedgeley was once more, in her opinion, a very poſitive, prejudiced, awkward, and unpleaſant young man. The joy ſhe felt at the

the idea of Melford's returning to his allegiance, baniſhed from her mind the objection of Lydia's being firſt married, and abſolutely made her renounce her uſual prudence of preſerving the conſtancy of Sedgeley as a *corps de reſerve* in a caſe of extremity.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXIV.

THE DOUBLE MARRIAGE.

THE day appointed for the nuptial ceremonies arrived; and Hymen attended the altar with his double torch. The ſervice was performed in the village Church; and both the brides were given away by Mr. Collins, an old admirer of the Vicar's ſiſter. Heaven never ratified the vows of purer or more affectionate hearts.

The dreſſes of the ladies were contrived with great taſte and becoming ſimplicity. A tear ſtarted to the eye of Lydia, which Manning kiſſed away. Miſs Douglas looked a little pale, but her fine complexion ſoon reſumed its native beauty. All the company behaved with that decorum which the ſolemnity of the occaſion required, except Francis, who received a rebuke from the Vicar for whiſpering Maria while he was marrying his ſiſter.

Roſina, deeply affected by the awfulneſs of the ceremony, to which the very excellent manner in which the Vicar performed it, not a little contributed, or impreſſed by ſenſations which may be eaſily gueſſed, was all attention; and when it was over, ſhe folded both her ſiſters to her heart, and mingled with her congratulations tears of unutterable ſenſibility.

On

On their return to the Vicarage, the Vicar produced three hundred pounds, and offered it to Manning, as his daughter's portion. He refuſed to receive it; the poſſeſſion of Lydia was the treaſure of his ſoul, and no portion could add to her value: but he begged that it might be given to Roſina, as a ſmall mark of his and her ſiſter's eſteem. This generoſity deeply affected the Vicar: Roſina continued ſilent; but Miſs Margaret extolled the ſpirited liberality of his conduct with unceaſing raptures.

The delight of preparing the marriage feaſt was the peculiar right of Miſs Margaret; and ſhe had elaborately exerted all her ability to render it pleaſingly elegant. She experienced, however, ſome mortification: a little motley Cupid, which ſhe had erected on a tranſparent pedeſtal, no ſooner made its appearance on the table,

than it ſunk beneath a ſea of jelly. A towering pyramid of blanc-mange, tottering from its height, ſunk to its foundation in ruin and diſorder. To the Vicar, indeed, theſe misfortunes afforded ſome pleaſure; for he had ſtrenuouſly oppoſed her borrowing ſhapes from a lady in the neighbourhood, upon a conception that the parade of ſuch diſhes was incompatible with the humility of his condition.

After dinner was over, the Vicar's cottagers were not forgotten. The old man, who ſeldom taſted any thing ſtronger than milk, now drank off a bumper of cider to the proſperity of the new-married couples. He deſired, as he leaned over his ſupporting crutch, to behold his beloved Lydia, and Manning led her to him. He bleſſed them both, and dropped a tear of gratitude and joy upon her fair hand. He begged, if it

was

was not too bold, that he might be permitted to ſee Maſter Francis and his lady. They inſtantly appeared: Maria turned her cheeks to his lips; and he invoked the choiceſt bleſſings of Heaven on the children of his benefactor.

Miſs Margaret, with great pleaſure and alacrity, diſtributed the cake, ribbons, and gloves. The family of the Norris's, for very obvious reaſons, were the firſt who received theſe bridal favours; and Miſs Margaret took care to accompany them with a note of her own writing, though in the names of the brides, the exultation of which did not excite much reliſh for the preſent they received.

The Vicarage continued for ſome time to be the region of delight. Captain Manning, however, felt an impatient wiſh to introduce his wife to his mother and ſiſter;

and as Maria had received a letter from Scotland concerning the ſettlement of ſome buſineſs which required the inſpection of her huſband, a propoſal was made to quit the Vicarage. Both parties were equally deſirous of Roſina's company; and it was at length agreed that ſhe ſhould firſt go with Mr. and Mrs. Ouſeley to Edinburgh; and that they ſhould all, on their return, ſpend ſome months at Manning's houſe.

Miſs Margaret was alſo preſſed, in a complimentary way, to take the excurſion. Her inclinations were for ſome time divided between her affection for the Vicar, and her fondneſs for amuſement. It was now winter: and the idea of being exalted in a high phaeton, and drawn about, like a triumphant Queen, by the northern ſwains on the frozen lakes of Edinburgh, or the Tweed, was highly pleaſing to her imagi-

nation;

nation; but the ſolitary and uncomfortable ſituation in which ſhe conceived her abſence would leave her brother, at length conquered her predilection for pleaſure: ſhe reſolved therefore, to remain at the Vicarage; but ſhe every now and then interrupted the comfort of the Vicar by reminding him of the ſacrifice which ſhe had made to it.

Roſina captivated all who ſaw her at Edinburgh; and, had the family remained there much longer, ſhe muſt have become the moſt celebrated toaſt of the time. Her conduct, however, was remarkably circumſpect and prudent; and ſhe gave very little encouragement to Caledonian gallantry. Her whole mind, indeed, was occupied with the tranſporting expectation of meeting Melford during her ſtay at Manning's; and ſhe waited, with the moſt impatient anxiety,

for her brother and ſiſter's departure from Edinburgh.

Francis, having at length finiſhed his buſineſs, departed from Edinburgh, and arrived at his brother-in-law's houſe, where they were received with demonſtrations of welcome, which can only ariſe from the pureſt affection of the heart. The ſcene of happineſs which Lydia and Manning exhibited, was delightful to behold. Health and vivacity, peace and content reigned throughout the houſe, and completely contradicted the cynical obſervation, that perfect felicity cannot be experienced on this ſide the grave.

The veſtige of ſuperior lovelineſs was ſtill diſcoverable in the features of Manning's mother; and the pleaſing affability of her manners indicated the goodneſs of her heart, while the good ſenſe and vivacity of

of her converſation rendered her company enviable and intereſting.

Her daughter Eliza was now in the eighteenth year of her age. She was not handſome; but there was a mild and gentle appearance in her countenance, an expreſſion of ſuch touching ſenſibility in her features, that ſhe inſtantly prepoſſeſſed every feeling heart in her favour. Her voice was finely modulated to the ſtrain of pity; her eyes beamed a ray of the divine compaſſion of her heart. Flexible as the bending ozier, ſhe was ſuſceptible to the ſlighteſt breezes of affliction, and ſhe ſeemed born to inſpire tenderneſs and love. She was the adoration of her brother; and Lydia loved her for his ſake and for her own.

The houſe was ſituated in the middle of a beautiful country; but it poſſeſſed the ſingular advantage of an excellent neigh-

bourhood. Winter had ſtripped the ſurrounding woods of their verdure; their ſituation, however, made it obvious that, during the ſofter ſeaſons of the year, they muſt be delightful.

The bridal rejoicings were not yet over; every day preſented ſome new entertainment; and the arrival of the reſt of the family was welcomed by a new ſucceſſion of viſits from the innumerable friends which the complacency of Mrs. Manning had created throughout the country.

The heart of Roſina rebounded to the felicity which her ſiſter enjoyed; but ſhe felt ſome diſappointment in not ſeeing Melford among the number of her friends. Delicacy and pride, however, reſtrained her tongue from dropping the ſlighteſt hint to Manning upon the ſubject; and though the anxiety of her mind forced her to truſt

the

the feelings of her heart to Lydia, ſhe could not gain any ſatisfactory intelligence concerning the object of her affection. The attentions, however, of the country beaux contributed to divert her mind; and her charms made conſiderable havoc among their hearts. One of them in particular ſpoke ſeriouſly to Manning on the ſubject of his attachment to her; and poor Roſina was not a little rallied on the conqueſt ſhe had made. This gentleman was a ſecond Acteon; and Roſina, in anſwer to Manning's raillery, aſſured him that ſhe had no ambition of rivalling *a favourite mare*, nor ſhould ſhe place herſelf in competition with *a pack of fox-hounds*; and therefore deſired he would ſignify to the gentleman that ſhe could not think of becoming his helpmate.

While ſhe waited in daily expectation that Melford would arrive, ſhe received a letter from Miſs Margaret at the Vicarage. She had, indeed, received ſeveral ſince her departure; but let this ſuffice as a ſpecimen of them all.

TO MISS OUSELEY.

"DEAR CHILD,

"I am quite ſick at your long abſence. Sedgeley has pined in thought ever ſince you left us. He has compoſed a ſort of elegiac ode on the flight of Daphne; and we all know that by Daphne he means Roſina Ouſeley. The Vicar is frequently troubled with the hip, and I aſſure you I am not much better.

"Sally

"Sally Norris has received a very elegant cap from London. She certainly does not become a faſhionable dreſs; ſhe ſported it, however, laſt night at Mrs. Jefferies's, where we had a great deal of company. Amongſt the reſt was her nephew, who is juſt let looſe from the Univerſity. He is the moſt doleful figure you ever ſaw, and looks as if he was upon the eve of blowing out his brains with a piſtol; that is, if he has any, my dear, I mean.

"I requeſt that you will be more particular in your next. Tell me, Roſina, of all the conqueſts you made at Edinburgh. Say what you are doing at Captain Manning's, and whether Melford is there: if he is, I make no doubt— But it is no matter; for Sedgeley loves you, I am ſure; ſo you are always certain of one.

"I have

"I have got a new Novel, which affords me a few hours' recreation. The white gown ſhall be altered againſt you come back. Take care of yourſelf.

"Your father joins me in love to your brothers and ſiſters. Believe me

"Your's affectionately,

"MARGARET OUSELEY."

CHAP.

CHAP. XXV.

THE ARRIVAL OF MELFORD.

THE conviviality which reigned at Manning's reſidence made it the favourite reſort of the young and gay; and every hour preſented an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of ſocial pleaſure and domeſtic felicity.

One evening, when a large *partie* were aſſembled round a commerce-table, the ſervant haſtily entered the room, and whiſpered ſomething in his maſter's ear. Captain

tain Manning immediately retired; and, after an abſence of ſome time, returned, accompanied by no leſs welcome a viſitor than his friend—Melford!

What were the feelings of Roſina when he approached the table! Her face glowed with the bluſhes of confuſion—her ſenſes ſeemed bewildered. She was dealing the cards; and, by collecting her ſcattered ſpirits, ſhe was enabled, for a moment, to continue the deal; but, after having dealt about one-half of them wrong, the remainder of the pack dropped from her trembling hand. This accident, as it was called, increaſed her confuſion; and though ſhe held, the next deal, a pair royal of Kings, ſhe was going to throw up her hand, till Manning, who had watched her emotions, aſked her what ſhe was about?

Eliza,

Eliza, perceiving Roſina's diſtreſs, endeavoured to divert the attention of the company by entering into a converſation with Melford.—"What have you been doing with yourſelf, Captain Melford," ſaid ſhe, "ſince we had the pleaſure of ſeeing you? You look pale and thin; the diſſipations of Bath do not ſeem to have agreed with you. I aſſure you we heard of your flirtations with Miſs—— what is her name? you know whom I mean. Fame ſpeaks ſo highly of her charms, that one is apt to conclude they cannot all be natural."

Roſina's heart vibrated to the ſound of Eliza's voice, while ſhe thanked her for the interpoſition.

"Oh!" exclaimed Melford with rapture,

"She is more than painting can expreſs,
"Or youthful poets fancy when they love."

But

But really whether ſhe is indebted more to nature or to art for the beauty ſhe poſſeſſes, except like Will Honeycomb I had ſtarted from behind the tapeſtry, and ſurpriſed her at her toilet, I cannot poſſibly, my dear creature, completely aſcertain; though I I believe I ſhould not ſpeak untrue, if I were to ſay that her complexions came from France. The follies of faſhion cannot deprave my taſte, I aſſure you; I am ſtill the ſame warm admirer of honeſt nature as ever. I adore the warm glow," he continued, leaning on a chair oppoſite to Roſina, and fixing his quick and penetrating eyes upon her face, "I adore the warm glow which ſprings from the genuine feelings of the heart; it produces a vivid colouring which the cold and ſtudied hand of Art can never reach. The lovelineſs of nature warms the imagination with delicious ecſtacy; it feaſts the

the eye, enraptures the ſenſes, and communicates, by a ſort of magic ſympathy, the fineſt joy to every feeling of the heart."

"Well, but what marriages have lately taken place there?" interrupted Eliza.

"The laſt," replied Melford, "was between a young Creole and a ſuperannuated Dowager. The great contraſt of their characters furniſhed for ſome time a ſubject of equal laughter and ſurpriſe. The ſurpriſe, however, immediately vaniſhed when it was known that the Weſt-Indian, to uſe a technical expreſſion, had been recently ſtripped of his gaudy plumage by the vultures of London, and had prudently reſolved to feather his neſt again from the rich ſavings of the old lady's jointures; for, like the widow Snap, it was ſaid that ſhe had been endowed in more counties than one.

"A new

"A new face, alſo, came out before I quitted Bath, which raiſed great commotion. Among the rival beaux who ſtood candidates for her favour, were the Honourable Mr. Roberts and Sir John Bentley. She was reputed to be immenſely rich, and the contention therefore, as you will imagine, ran very high. Their ſucceſs, however, ſeemed to be equal, till Mr. Roberts rattled by her window, round the Circus, in an elegant phaeton, which he managed with the grace of a Mercury, and gave a flutter to her heart that almoſt decided the conteſt in her favour. But his rival made his appearance, the next day, in a blazing new equipage, with a retinue behind it as numerous and ſuperb as that of an Ambaſſador or a Nabob; himſelf lolling with the eaſy grace of an Adonis in one corner of it; and it is now imagined

that

that ſhe will defer venturing her neck with Mr. Roberts, and go off *vis-à-vis* with Sir John."

"I don't credit one-half you have ſaid," cried Eliza; "theſe are the ſort of ſtories with which you always amuſe and diſappoint my curioſity when I enquire about news."

At this inſtant the commerce-pool being out, the card party broke up; and Melford, quitting his converſation with Eliza, advanced towards Roſina.—"It is unneceſſary, from your looks, Miſs Ouſeley," ſaid he, "to enquire if you have enjoyed perfect health ſince I had laſt the pleaſure of ſeeing you?"

Roſina's mind, from the moment it had recovered its compoſure, had been ſilently indulging a train of ſentiments highly favourable to the partialities of her heart; but Melford's injudicious queſtion reminding her

her of the circumſtances of their laſt interview, the cruel and diſhonourable part he had then acted, ruſhed with aggravation to her memory, and put all the arguments ſhe had been collecting in his favour to flight; and ſhe haſtily left the room without affording him any reply. Melford ſecretly acknowledged the propriety of her feelings; and, on her return to the company, he continued, during the remainder of the evening, to gaze in ſilence on her charms; not daring to ſpeak to her again, leſt the treacherous perturbation of his mind ſhould again betray his tongue into ſome unguarded expreſſion, repugnant to the intereſts of his heart.

When the company departed, Roſina immediately retired to her apartment; but her mind was too much agitated to enjoy the bleſſings of repoſe. The palpitations ſhe

ſhe had felt when Melford firſt entered the room, aſſured her that her heart remained unaltered in its attachment to him; and the quick ſenſibility which the bare recurrence of their laſt interview had produced, made that "aſſurance doubly ſure." She recollected, however, the dangerous miſts in which love and levity had heretofore involved her; and although ſhe had reſolutely determined to reform her conduct in the one, yet it appeared ſtill neceſſary to avoid the deluſions of the other; and as their preſent meeting was probably the important criſis of her fate, ſhe reſolved to act with great prudence and circumſpection. For this purpoſe ſhe laid her head upon the pillow, and began a very ſerious enquiry into the nature of her ſituation. That ſhe loved Melford with increaſing ardour was indiſputable; that Melford entertained a

paſſion

paſſion equally warm and tender for her, ſhe was fondly inclined to believe; but he had offered a groſs and unprincipled inſult to her virtue. Theſe ſeveral truths were placed in all the various combinations to which an ingenuous mind, anxious to reconcile the adverſe claims of love and honour, could poſſibly reſort. The dexterity of love preſented to her mind a retroſpect of the innumerable levities ſhe had been guilty of; and ſhe endeavoured to palliate the flagrancy of his miſconduct, by imputing it to the miſtaken notions of her character, which they muſt unavoidably have raiſed in his mind. But the delicacy of inſulted honour oppoſed the forgiveneſs ſhe was ſo well inclined to afford him; and ſhe reſolved not to liſten to a reconciliation till ſhe was convinced of his contrition by the ſubmiſſiveneſs of his manners, and the ſincerity of his apology.

Under theſe circumſtances, but under no other, ſhe conceived that ſhe might, without the leaſt deviation from propriety, ſuffer her feelings to ſubſide.

The enſuing morning, as the ladies were quitting the breakfaſt parlour, Manning detained Roſina, and taking her tenderly by the hand, preſented her to Captain Melford, ſaying that he was thoroughly convinced of the ſorrow of his friend from the uneaſineſs he felt, and entreated that all coolneſs between them might ceaſe. Her brother Francis alſo joined his entreaties to the ſame purpoſe, and aſſured her that all animoſity between himſelf and Captain Melford was entirely done away, and that the ſincereſt reconciliation had taken place.

"I hope," exclaimed Melford, "that Miſs Ouſeley will not be leſs generous than her brother, nor withhold a forgiveneſs that

will render me ſo happy."—Melford continued to preſs his petition with all that inſinuating and attractive grace which had before rendered his eloquence ſo dangerous and ſeductive. Conſcious of the power of his charms, he aſſured himſelf of ſucceſs; and, aſſuming the lofty air of confidence, he attempted to ſeize the hand which Manning held. The boldneſs and preſumption of this attempt hurt extremely the natural pride and delicacy of Roſina's mind, and militated ſo ſtrongly againſt that humble and obſequious ſtyle which ſhe expected would attend the firſt expreſſions of his ſorrow and repentance, that ſhe coldly withdrew her hand; and, ſaying that ſhe was happy to hear he had effected a reconciliation with her brother, walked compoſedly and calmly out of the room. This was the firſt effort of prudence, as ſhe conceived

it,

it, to diſpel the deluſions of love; and ſhe beſtowed the higheſt encomiums on the propriety of her conduct, and the ſteadineſs of her reſolution. But the ſucceſs which ſhe attributed to this policy, led her into extremes which proved fatal to her repoſe; for, obſerving that Melford was very ſenſibly mortified by the coldneſs of her behaviour, ſhe entertained the romantic notion of exciting his ſenſibility by an affected diſdain, of quickening his paſſion by ſeeming to diſregard it, of making him languiſh for her ſmiles by the frequency of her frowns, of reducing him, in ſhort, to that paſſive, trembling, yielding ſtate, which ſhe conceived could alone atone for his former guilt, and perſuade her feelings to forgive him. This reſolution, however, only ſerved to rekindle in her boſom the lambent flame of vanity which ſhe had

imagined was expired, and to rivet her more ſtedfaſtly to this prepoſterous line of conduct.

Such a conduct with ſome characters might have proved effective, but Melford poſſeſſed a diſpoſition too imperious to be controuled by the caprices of female tyranny; and although he had reaſon to be aſſured of Roſina's virtue, he ſtill thought her a light, volatile, and vain character, who would flirt with every coxcomb, and triumph in the idea of having given pain to a man of ſenſe. The coldneſs with which ſhe had repulſed his firſt overtures toward reconciliation, and the faſtidious ſtyle of her ſubſequent behaviour, mortified and aſtoniſhed him; eſpecially as he could not conceive ſhe would expect him to become a very humble ſuppliant to expiate an offence which he was conſcious he ſhould never

never have attempted, if he had not been encouraged to it by her own levity. He therefore concluded that ſhe deſired to keep not only his heart, but his underſtanding in captivity; to ſport with the tenderneſs ſhe had inſpired, and to betray him into thoſe abſurd and weak actions he had ſo frequently ridiculed in other men.

Both parties acted from their preconceived opinions of each other with equal pertinacity, and exhibited an entertainment as ludicrous to the reſt of the family, as it was painful and dangerous to themſelves. Roſina had modelled her features to ſo exact a correſpondence with the principles of her policy, that Melford with all his vigilance could not catch from her eyes one favourable glance. So well did ſhe play her part, that if his knowledge of her character had not aſſured him her behaviour was a mere ſtratagem

to reduce him to a level with her wiſhes, he muſt certainly have thought that he had loſt all influence over her heart. But his ſubtilty and penetration were not eaſily impoſed upon, and he reſolved to treat her in her own way. Lively, entertaining, and full of ſpirits with the reſt of the family, he conducted himſelf with the coldeſt formality and reſerve towards Roſina. He ſeemed anxious to avoid her company, preſerved a profound ſilence whenever ſhe ſpoke, and always dropped every ſubject which tended to mutual converſation: in ſhort, Melford treated her with ſo much neglect, that Roſina began to be very ſeriouſly alarmed, and to conjecture that ſhe had ſacrificed her real happineſs to ridiculous etiquette.

One morning, as Roſina was ſitting in the drawing-room, writing to her aunt,

Eliza

Eliza ſuddenly ruſhed in, followed by Melford, who had been teazing her to romp with him.—"You are really very impertinent, Captain Melford," cried Eliza; "I beg you will deſiſt, or I ſhall place myſelf under the protection of Miſs Ouſeley, and requeſt of her to check your boldneſs."

"I beg ten thouſand pardons," exclaimed Melford, "for this intruſion; I did not know the lady was writing. Come, Eliza, come away; I muſt requeſt that you will not interrupt her. Come."

"Not with you, truly," replied Eliza, with ſaucy familiarity.

"Well, come into the library, then," ſaid Melford, "and I will not teaze you any longer. Come, and I will read the new play to you as you deſired me."

"No, I will wait till Roſina has finiſhed her letter," ſaid Eliza, "and we will then come together."

"Oh, Madam!" replied Melford, "if you have provided yourſelf with a companion, you cannot poſſibly want any one to read to you. Beſides, I have letters to write."

"You are the ſtrangeſt creature in the world," exclaimed Eliza tenderly; "but you ſhall read to me, and we will not diſturb Miſs Ouſeley a moment longer; for I am ſure ſhe cannot write a line while you are by."

Captain Melford ſeized Eliza's hand, and with a ſaucy ſmile, led her from the room.

Eliza, when ſhe ſaid that Roſina could not write a line while Melford was by, had very innocently expreſſed a truth, which Roſina hoped the veil of her affected indifference had impenetrably concealed. Agitated by the intended offence which ſhe conceived this abrupt intruſion conveyed,

ſhe had, indeed, no power to controul the dictates of her mind, and ſcarcely ſtrength enough to hold her pen. The gay and laughing manner, in which Eliza had diſcloſed this mortifying truth, bore, to Roſina's ear, the appearance of irony; and the anxiety with which Melford had ſolicited Eliza to leave the room the moment ſhe hinted an intention of waiting for Roſina, planted thorns upon her tortured mind. The ſpectre jealouſy took full poſſeſſion of her breaſt, and a thouſand trivial circumſtances now occurred to her tainted fancy, to confirm the notion that Melford had transferred his fondneſs to Eliza. The pleaſing viſion of gaining a victory over the haughty ſpirit of her lover, vaniſhed in a moment; and deſpair, with all its black and gloomy train of falſe ideas, occupied her mind. In taking a ſurvey

of the hopeful ſtate from which ſhe had fallen, ſhe placed the blameleſs manners, the gentle temper, the unaffected graces of Eliza, in oppoſition to the caprice and levity of her own behaviour; and the compariſon confirmed the ſentiment that jealouſy had inſpired. She ſaw Eliza, like a guardian angel arrayed in all her charms, weaning Melford from his imperious follies, teaching him the ſweets of domeſtic bliſs, and winning, by her precepts, his mind to admiration, and his heart to love. The dark picture which her diſordered imagination brought diſcoloured to her view, was too dreadful to behold, and ſhe burſt into tears.

Speaking of love, the poet ſays, when once jealouſy diffuſes itſelf through the mind, there is an end of all pleaſures.

"Ye

"Ye fairy proſpects then,
"Ye beds of roſes, and ye bowers of joy,
"Farewel! ye gleamings of departed peace,
"Shine out your laſt! The yellow tinging plague
"Internal viſion taints, and in a night
"Of livid gloom imagination wraps."

THOMSON.

Roſina, however, felt too proudly upon this ſubject to afford triumph to a ſucceſsful rival and a faithleſs lover by the diſcovery of her ſorrows; and ſhe endeavoured, by every conſolatory expedient, to calm the tumults of her breaſt. While this prudent reſolution was paſſing in her mind, ſhe heard the voice of Melford upon the lawn. She approached the window, and ſaw his phaeton waiting at the door. He handed Eliza into it, looked up to the window of the drawing-room, and whiſpered his companion; they both ſmiled, and the carriage drove away.

"That ſmile," cried Roſina, "is at my expence."—Her heated mind no longer liſtened to the cold dictates of the reſolution ſhe had formed, and ſhe again burſt into a flood of tears. Dejected from the higheſt hope, diſappointed of the faireſt proſpects, and humbled in her own eſtimation, ſhe felt the additional mortification of having only her own folly and imprudence to accuſe in trifling away the deareſt felicity of her life.

During the remainder of the day ſhe made every effort to appear cheerful and unconcerned; but pain, like a gnawing vulture, lay ſilently preying upon her heart. The idea, however, of preventing Melford and Eliza from triumphing in her diſtreſs ſupported her ſpirits; and ſhe acted her part with great courage till the hours of

ſleep

ſleep called the family to their reſpective apartments, when ſhe threw herſelf, undreſſed, upon the bed, and lamented, with unavailing ſighs and tears, the fatal conſequences of her inconſiderate vanity and uſeleſs pride.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVI.

THE ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

ROSINA, after paſſing a ſleepleſs night, went down in the morning to the library, before the family had aſſembled to breakfaſt. She was turning over ſome volumes that were laying on the table, when chancing to glance her eyes round the room, ſhe diſcovered a ſmall portrait of Captain Melford on the oppoſite compartment of the wainſcot. This portrait had been procured by Melford

in London at the particular requeſt of Captain Manning, who wiſhed to place it among a collection of pictures of his favourite friends: and he had hung it up here, for the preſent, the preceding evening. The book which Roſina had taken up, dropped from her hand, and ſhe haſtily quitted the table to examine the portrait with eager curioſity and fond attention. The artiſt had been extremely happy in delineating the fine expreſſion of his countenance; the eyes beamed with that irreſiſtible ſoftneſs which had ſo forcibly communicated their influence to her heart, and ſo often declared that the world without her would be taſteleſs and inſipid. Life ſeemed to animate every feature. The glow of various emotions appeared in the ſuffuſions of his cheek; and the lips looked as if they were juſt opening to pour forth all the dangerous eloquence

which

which dwelt upon his tongue.—"Happy Eliza!" exclaimed Roſina, as ſhe leant her head upon her hand in a poſture of meditation; a heavy ſigh burſt from her boſom—a tear ſtarted to her eye—ſhe was pulling out her handkerchief to wipe it away, when ſhe felt her hand ſuddenly withheld; ſhe ſtarted in amaze, and turning round, beheld——Captain Melford! the animated original of the picture at which ſhe was gazing; for, at that moment, every feeling which the painter had ſo finely portrayed, was viſible in his countenance.

The ſudden ſurpriſe faſcinated all her faculties; and ſhe ſtood for ſome moments unable to withdraw her hand. Imagining that ſhe was become indifferent to him, ſhe ſuppoſed that the diſcovery he had made would afford him an opportunity of triumphing over her weakneſs. The idea ſhocked her

her pride—it was inſupportable to her feelings; her limbs began to fail her, ſhe burſt into an agony of tears, and ſunk breathleſs upon a chair.

The reſolution which Melford had ſo ſucceſsfully maintained of affecting an indifference toward Roſina, immediately vaniſhed. He ſat down by her ſide, he gazed upon her with attention, he felt the power of her charms, and when her agitation had decreaſed, and her mind become compoſed, he addreſſed her with all the ſerioufneſs and ſincerity of true affection.

"Am I, Miſs Ouſeley," ſaid he, "to hold myſelf entirely indebted to chance for the diſcovery of your ſentiments, or may I flatter myſelf that the natural candour of your mind could not much longer have concealed them from me? We have both of us, I fear, been trifling with the intereſts of happineſs;

pineſs: we have been our own tormentors; and, inſtead of promoting our felicity, have heaped unneceſſary anxieties upon each other. I ſhall not now ſcruple to declare that I have loved you from the firſt moment I ſaw you; but, as I am determined to be candid, I muſt acknowledge that my underſtanding diſapproved of the inclinations of my heart. My paſſion has been ardent and tumultuous; but it has wanted that eſteem which the approbation of reaſon can alone produce. While my ſoul felt the irreſiſtible power of your beauty, your character appeared ſo volatile and giddy, that I doubted whether I could ſafely place my happineſs in your care; and I ſolemnly declare it was your levity alone which could have induced me to indulge a ſentiment againſt your virtue. Whenever I was abſent from you, I was miſerable. The vivacity of your diſpoſition

poſſeſſes

poſſeſſes irreſiſtible charms; and at the fatal moment I gave you reaſon to complain of my integrity, I lamented the conduct which miſled my mind. In thoſe quiet and reflecting moments, "when Reaſon takes her turn to reign, and every paſſion falls before her throne," how have I regretted that the eccentricity of your ſpirits was untempered by prudence! How often have I wiſhed that the propriety of your conduct had enabled me to make ſuch propoſals to you as honour would have dictated, and reaſon approved."

"This ſtyle of converſation, Sir," cried Roſina, riſing in violent agitation from the chair, "is not to be borne; I cannot any longer liſten to your inſulting diſcourſe."

"Oh Roſina!" exclaimed Melford, detaining her hand, "this is the moſt important moment that has ever occurred ſince

our

our firſt acquaintance: I love you—I have your intereſt as well as my own at heart; call it not an inſulting converſation; it is, my Roſina, the ſolemn language of truth, dictated by the ſincerity of my heart, and the purity of my love. To throw aſide the deceitful arts of flattery is the ſtrongeſt proof of my affection; and I have a pride in my nature which makes me wiſh that the woman I would call my wife, ſhould be as pure in her mind as ſhe is angelic in her perſon."

Roſina reſeated herſelf.

"Infatuated by the intemperance of thoughtleſs paſſion, I aſſailed your ears with a baſe propoſal which I now bluſh to recollect. But Oh! how firmly did that trial of your virtue eſtabliſh your empire in my heart! The indignation of offended innocence, and the honeſt warmth of conſcious purity

purity gave a ſeraphic appearance to your heavenly form, which will remain for ever unobliterated on my mind. At that moment my converſation, indeed, inſulted you; but I have ever ſince abhorred myſelf for the impious and unwarrantable attempt. Remorſe ſeized my mind, and I have lived a pitiable victim from the ſenſe of my tranſgreſſion. I am not a hardened libertine; the voluptuary is, in every ſenſe, a character I deſpiſe; but falſe hopes, falſe ideas, falſe wiſhes led me into the path of error, and by attempting your virtue, I diſgraced my own. My crime was great, but my puniſhment has been ſevere. I was baniſhed from your preſence; but, alas! I could not be happy without you, and I wiſhed for ſome means of expiating my offence. To throw myſelf at your feet, to implore your forgiveneſs, to ſolicit an honourable union, to

ſubmit

ſubmit my fortune and myſelf to your diſpoſal, were the only means which appeared entitled to ſucceſs; but I dreaded the danger of confiding my honour to one whoſe only notions of happineſs ſeemed concentrated in the love of undiſtinguiſhing admiration. Yet greatly apprehenſive as I was, there is no conceſſion that I ſhould have ſcrupled to make, in hope of obtaining your forgiveneſs, if you had not threatened me with your brother's vengeance. The denunciation hurt my pride; my haughty ſoul took fire at the idea, and ſet my wounded feelings in a flame. I left Lanſdowne in a ſtate of diſtraction; and while my mind was irritated by the idea your threat had inſpired, I unfortunately met your brother; the unhappy conſequences of that interview you already know. The kindneſs of Providence has at length rendered them leſs fatal than I had any reaſon to expect; and when I

reflected

reflected to what an unpardonable length the intemperance of paſſion had driven me—that I had again offended you by inſulting your brother, all hope of forgiveneſs and reconciliation vaniſhed from my mind. I went to Bath, under an idea that the diverſions of that place would baniſh your image from my mind; but the waters, alas! had no Lethean opiate to deaden my recollections; and the diſſipations in which I engaged, only ſerved to remind me of thoſe ſcenes of calm comfort and ſuperior delight which my fancy ſo frequently formed in uniting myſelf with you. During my reſidence at Bath I received a letter from my friend Manning, in which he informed me that you were here; and well knowing the indelible nature of the paſſion which poſſeſſes my heart, he invited me to viſit him, upon the ſtrongeſt aſſurances that I ſhould find the objectionable parts of your

character

character totally reformed. My inclinations obeyed the invitation of my friend, and I flew hither upon the wings of love. Ever ſince my arrival I have been a very critical obſerver of your conduct; and the preſages of my friend are, I am convinced, founded upon the happieſt omens. Theſe ſentiments may, perhaps, amaze you; but wild as I may have appeared, I have always admired and venerated the dignity of the female character. There is a certain chaſtity of deportment which will awe the boldeſt manners into ſubmiſſive reverence; it corrects while it ſoftens, and ripens love and fondneſs into friendſhip and eſteem. In the truth of theſe obſervations I am perſuaded your good ſenſe will acquieſce; but ſince my arrival here, you have choſen to treat me with a coldneſs which has hurt me more than I can expreſs. I imputed it at firſt to ſome remains of that coquetry of which I have been complaining;

but

but you perſevered in it with ſo much conſiſtency, that I acknowledge I have, at times, been fearful of having loſt your eſteem. This doubt determined me to force an *eclairciſſement* by ſome means or other; and I certainly ſhould have deviſed a ſcheme for this purpoſe, had not the accident of this morning prevented the neceſſity of it, and relieved me from the fears which I entertained. The candour with which I have now converſed with you, Roſina, muſt convince you of my affection. We have both of us been miſtaken; but, conſcious of our follies, we have only to amend them. My heart reſts on you for its happineſs; I have formed plans of felicity which I hope you will aſſiſt me to realize. Let this dear hand become the pledge of your pardon, and the cement of eternal peace. Let me," continued he, attempting fondly to preſs her

to his boſom, "call you the beloved of my heart, my loved, my now eſteemed, and more than ever admired Roſina."

This diſcourſe at leaſt convinced Roſina that her jealouſy of Eliza was without foundation; but it by no means ſatisfied her mind with reſpect to the ſubmiſſive apology which ſhe expected to receive from Melford. Perceiving, therefore, that ſhe ſtill maintained her aſcendency over his heart, ſhe again aſſumed her reſolution to extort from him that humble acknowledgment of ſorrow which ſhe thought it was his duty to make; and ſhe accordingly coldly rejected the offer of his hand.

Melford was very ſenſibly mortified by her conduct; and, riſing haughtily from the chair, exclaimed, "It is very well, Madam; I muſt acknowledge I did not expect this behaviour."

At

At this moment Captain Manning entered the library.—"So, good folks," cried he, "what has been your ſtudy this morning? Natural philoſophy, the anatomy of a butterfly, or a diſſertation on the tender paſſions? We have been waiting breakfaſt for you this hour."—He accordingly took Roſina's hand to lead her from the room. Roſina was apprehenſive, from the warmth of Melford's laſt obſervation, that ſhe had carried her reluctance rather too far; and being willing to prevent a renewal of his coldneſs, ſhe aſked Manning if he would not alſo deſire his friend's company.

"Why, my dear," cried Manning, "if you are ſo particularly anxious for it, had you not better deſire it yourſelf? Here Captain Melford," exclaimed he, "is a lady who begs to know if we ſhall not be honoured with your company to breakfaſt."

Melford, who was ſullenly tumbling over ſome books, with the affected ſmile of a man conſcious of his power, advanced towards Roſina, and attempted to take hold of her hand. The diſtreſs and confuſion of her countenance betrayed the awkward ſituation in which ſhe had involved herſelf; but "ſtill bluſhing deeper ſweets," ſhe turned ſuddenly about, and leaving the two friends together, ran with precipitation into the breakfaſt-parlour; where, the family being all aſſembled, ſhe was ſafe from the danger of further particular converſation from her diſappointed and aſtoniſhed lover.

Beſides the hopes of gratifying her pride by obliging the haughty temper of Melford to capitulate upon the terms ſhe had in her own mind preſcribed, Roſina entertained very ſerious doubts of the propriety of affording any encouragement to his addreſſes until

until ſhe had ſubmitted all the circumſtances of her ſituation to her father's conſideration; and knowing that if Melford's profeſſions were ſincere, he would not only follow her with pleaſure, but approve of ſuch an inſtance of filial attention, ſhe conceived the idea of departing immediately for this purpoſe to the Vicarage. This reſolution, however, was much more the dictate of prudence than of art; ſhe had already experienced the dangers of indulging a ſecret correſpondence, and had ſeen the dilemma to which her ſiſter was reduced by concealing the inclinations of her heart. She had, therefore, long reſolved, if ever Melford ſhould renew his addreſſes, to ſubmit his pretenſions to the judgment and diſcernment of her indulgent parent, and to let his approbation alone authorize the hopes of her lover. Melford had himſelf ſeverely in-

culcated the leſſon of prudence and propriety upon Roſina's mind. His declaration, that there was a period in her life at which he feared to truſt his honour to her care, made a very ſerious impreſſion, and ſhe determined to profit by the information. Her pride and delicacy were equally ſhocked by the humiliating idea; her ſenſibility was awakened by the poignancy of the reproof; it conveyed an imputation which ſmote every feeling of her ſoul with mortification.

Under theſe painful ſenſations, the idea of repoſing the circumſtances of her ſituation in the boſom of a fond father, whom ſhe juſtly conſidered as her trueſt friend—of alleviating her ſorrows by the balm of his conſolatory tenderneſs, if her hopes ſhould be eventually diſappointed—or of irradiating her felicity by his approbation, if her wiſhes ſhould be accompliſhed, was as highly gratifying.

gratifying to the natural probity of her mind, as it was prudently adapted to ſecure the ultimate tranquillity of her heart.

She accordingly communicated to her ſiſter Lydia all that had paſſed during her accidental interview and *eclairciſſement* with Melford, and requeſted her advice upon the propriety of her meditated departure. Lydia applauded the ſpirit and prudence of her ſiſter's reſolution in the warmeſt terms; and, aſſuring her that ſhe need not to alarm her mind with fears that Melford would not follow, promiſed to prepare every thing that was neceſſary for her departure the enſuing morning, with ſo profound a ſecrecy, that Melford ſhould not even ſuſpect the event.

The alacrity of Lydia afforded Roſina the higheſt pleaſure; and as ſhe was now ſatisfied that the idea of being rivalled by

Eliza was the mere phantom of her own jealouſy, ſhe felt her fondneſs return, and entreated her ſiſter to obtain Mrs. Manning's conſent to let her ſiſter-in-law accompany her to the Vicarage.

Mrs. Manning, with ſome reluctance, conſented to part with her daughter; and having taken leave at night of thoſe who knew their intentions, they prepared to ſet out very early the next morning. The carriage was ready at the hour appointed; and, on Roſina's ſtepping into it, ſhe looked up at Melford's window. He had perceived that a ſcheme of ſome kind was in agitation; and, hearing a chaiſe drive to the door, had riſen from his bed, put on his morning-gown, and was, at the inſtant Roſina looked up, drawing back the window-curtain to obſerve what was going forward. Roſina was by no means diſpleaſed

that

that he had diſcovered her departure; for, to ſpeak the truth, the hope that he would immediately follow her was all that ſupported the depreſſion of ſpirits which ſeized her on leaving him in a ſtate of irreconciliation. Her eyes wandered impatiently toward every chaiſe which approached them on the road; and the perturbation of her mind betrayed her expectation of beholding, before ſhe reached home, the dear object of her heart. No ſuch thing, however, happened; and as the froſt was now over, they made ſuch expedition, that they reached the Vicarage the following day.

About a mile from the Vicarage they met young Sedgeley, who had been muſing upon an adjacent hill, which he had dignified with the title of Parnaſſus. The honeſt feelings of Roſina burſt forth at the ſight of her old acquaintance, and ſhe ſtopped

the poſtillion to ſpeak to him. His ſurpriſe, however, at ſeeing her ſo unexpectedly was ſo great, that he had ſcarcely power to ſpeak to her; but his eyes were perfectly intelligent. During his converſation he caught a glimpſe of Eliza's face, as ſhe ſat cloſe in one corner of the chaiſe, endeavouring to conceal herſelf from his obſervation by the ſhelter of her hat. This concealment excited his curioſity to ſuch a degree, that Roſina could not help ſmiling at the various efforts he made to get a peep at her fair companion; and, pitying his diſappointment, laughingly told him that they were not ſo fatigued but that they ſhould be glad to ſee a viſitor in the evening.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVI.

THE PURSUIT.

THE unexpected arrival of Roſina at the Vicarage diffuſed the higheſt pleaſure; and her fair companion received the moſt cordial welcome.

Miſs Margaret, impatient to hear every incident that had happened ſince their ſeparation, took the earlieſt opportunity of retiring with her niece; but Roſina's heart was too much occupied to relate all the

trifles about which her aunt enquired; and therefore ſhe only mentioned, in a conciſe manner, what had paſſed relative to Melford. Though the abruptneſs of this narration did not gratify Miſs Margaret's curioſity, it afforded infinite ſatisfaction to the old lady, in whoſe mind not a doubt remained but that ſhe ſhould ſhortly be employed in preparations for the wedding of her favourite niece.

The account which Roſina gave to her father of the uninterrupted felicity which her brother and ſiſter enjoyed, afforded the warmeſt comfort to his heart. The happineſs of his children was his nightly dream, his daily prayer; and the delight which Roſina's relation gave him produced in his breaſt an overflow of joy.

Sedgeley came in the evening; he was in ecſtacies at ſeeing Roſina.—"So, Sir," ſaid Miſs

Miſs Margaret, "you were agreeably ſurpriſed to-day! I ſuppoſe your Muſe has not been idle upon ſo fine a ſubject. Upon my word, it might have afforded you an infinite number of happy ſimiles; ſuch as Aurora drawn by her fleet courſers—the riſing moon—the morning ſtar—"

"Certainly, Madam," interrupted Sedgeley, "beauty, like the ſun, diſperſes the miſts of dulneſs, ripens the latent ſeeds of genius, and, enriching the barren ſoil, draws from it thoſe ſprouts of fancy which, in time, mature into uſeful branches of literature."

The idea of having acted right, the delightful thought of being followed by Melford, gave new animation to the mind of Roſina, and diffuſed a luſtre over her countenance which rendered her more captivating than ever. She laughed and flirted with

with Sedgeley in all the complacency of high health and good ſpirits; inſiſted that to captivate, he muſt improve his taſte; and aſſured him that he was quite unfaſhionable in not wearing powder.—"Prior," continued ſhe, "has certainly celebrated a nut-brown maid; but was there ever ſuch a being thought of as a nut-brown youth?"

When Sedgeley departed, Eliza aſked who he was?

"He is one of our country Adonis's, my dear," ſaid Roſina.

"He is a lover of Miſs Ouſeley's," exclaimed Miſs Margaret.

"Miſs Ouſeley, Madam," cried Eliza, "is ſo univerſally beloved, that I really think we muſt ſoon form a combination againſt her for monopolizing all the beaux ſhe

upon."

Roſina,

Roſina, anxious to pour the burthen of her heart into the boſom of her father, aroſe very early the next morning, and repaired to the parlour, where he generally employed an hour before the reſt of the family were ſtirring. She was diſtreſſed, confuſed, and at a loſs how to begin. The Vicar perceived that her mind laboured with a burthen ſhe was anxious to diſcloſe, and, kindly ſoothing her, deſired ſhe would conceal nothing from him. She collected courage from his ſolicitations, and, after an awful pauſe, revealed to him all the ſecrets of her ſoul.

The viciſſitudes of feeling which the Vicar's heart underwent as Roſina related to him all the circumſtances of her acquaintance with Melford, were like the veering vane blown by oppoſing winds to every part of the compaſs. Melford's

perfidy and baſe attempt to take an advantage of the unſuſpecting levity of his innocent child cut him to the ſoul; but the rivetted fondneſs which he ſaw his daughter entertained for this young libertine, and the ſafety which her preſent confidence and candour promiſed, induced him to ſuppreſs the riſing anger it occaſioned. Anxiouſly tender for her happineſs, and charmed by the explicit confeſſion ſhe had made of her faults, he claſped her to his boſom, and ſhed tears of rapturous affection over the feelings of his child. He thought prudence the moſt ineſtimable virtue of the female character, and he now beheld it in its moſt amiable point of view. A daughter, whom he tenderly loved, had returned from the extravagances of error into the boſom of rectitude; her mind, reformed by a remembrance of the dangers ſhe had eſcaped,

turning

turning with deteſtation from the path of obliquity into the road of virtue and happineſs.

The Vicar, in the joy of his heart, complimented Roſina upon the revolution ſhe had thus happily effected; but his tongue was ſilent reſpecting Melford. The quickneſs of Roſina's mind perceived that ſomething, upon this ſubject, lay lurking at his heart; ſhe flattered herſelf, however, that Melford's character would, when he arrived, remove every objection that her father might have to their union.

Under this hope Roſina counted the coming hours, in anxious expectation of Melford's arrival; but hour after hour, and day after day elapſed in endleſs diſappointment. She wrote to Lydia, and waited with impatience for an anſwer; but the expected

pected time of bringing it arrived, and no anſwer was received.

She began to apprehend ſhe had loſt him for ever—that his pride, offended by her coldneſs, had induced him to think no more of her; and, though probity whiſpered that ſhe had acted conſiſtently with its dictates, her peace of mind was totally interrupted by the painful ſuppoſition.

During this awkward interval Sedgeley continued his viſits at the Vicarage; but the Vicar, thinking it diſhonourable to encourage his hopes when he knew his daughter's affections were engaged to another, received him with leſs cordiality than heretofore. Love is, however, happily blind; and Sedgeley, diſregarding, or not ſeeing the Vicar's diſcouragement, ſtill continued his viſits, hoping that time and perſeverance would reward his induſtry with the

deſired

deſired ſucceſs. The anguiſh, however, which preyed upon Roſina's mind, from Melford's abſence, did not much contribute to confirm his hopes. Her temper, though naturally accommodating and good, grew peeviſh and ſplenetic; and the poor Curate was compelled to bear with her ſilence, or endure the brunt of her ill-humour. Miſs Margaret, who always ſympathized with her niece, treated him juſt in the ſame manner; and from the gentle Eliza alone he received a favourable reception.

One evening he brought a poem of his own compoſing to the Vicarage; and was ſo much flattered with it himſelf, that he entertained no doubt but it would afford an equal amuſement to the ladies. He procured permiſſion to read it; but ſcarcely had he got through ſix lines, when Roſina, ſtruck by the abſurdity of ſome particular paſſage,

burſt

burſt into an immoderate fit of laughter. There is nothing which a man can ſo little brook as the ridicule of his own productions, becauſe nothing makes him appear in ſo ridiculous a light to himſelf; and the provoking apologies which ſhe made in excuſe for her conduct, ſo conſiderably augmented the anger of Sedgeley, that he was about to quit the room.

Eliza reprimanded her for her ill-timed merriment, and beſtowed the higheſt encomiums on the brilliancy of the poem. The young Curate, aſhamed of the paſſion into which he had been betrayed, reſeated himſelf in his chair, and, with a ſilly air, put his production into his pocket.

Eliza, by becoming the advocate of his verſes, won upon his heart. He had never before paid her any particular attention; but he

he now examined her beauties with the warmeſt predilection. The ſoft blue of her eyes—the bewitching ſenſibility by which they were irradiated—the dimples of complacency which, to uſe his favourite expreſſion, lay in ambuſh round her pretty mouth, inſpired him with admiration, and he began to draw ſome compariſons derogatory of Roſina's charms; wondering with himſelf that the difference of their beauty ſhould have ſo long eſcaped his notice.

He changed his ſeat, and ſat next to Eliza; he placed on his hand one of the long gloſſy ringlets which lay on her ſhoulder. "How beautiful!" he exclaimed. A bluſh overſpread the cheeks of Eliza as he ſpoke, which confirmed ſome ſuſpicions Roſina had already begun to entertain.

At

At ſupper he reſigned a place next her for one by Eliza; nor did it eſcape Miſs Margaret, who was not very well pleaſed at it, as ſhe wiſhed Sedgeley to continue an humble captive to Roſina, in caſe of accidents. In ſhort, not to make theſe pages, like Mr. Pope's wounded ſnake, "draw their ſlow length along," Sedgeley began ſeriouſly to admire Eliza; and though ſhe certainly was not ſo exquiſitely beautiful as his former miſtreſs, yet the brilliancy of her underſtanding placed her moſt juſtly, he thought, on an equality. The ſlight Roſina had put on his production convinced him that ſhe had no real genius; and he loved Eliza, who had diſcovered ſufficient taſte to applaud its merits.

Roſina felt the loſs of her lover with perfect tranquillity. Sedgeley had been more the object of her vanity than her love; and

as

as ſhe had now conquered thoſe ridiculous vagaries which her inconſiderate fondneſs for adulation had alone inſpired, ſhe endeavoured, with generous induſtry, to induce Eliza to liſten to his vows. They ſeemed, indeed, particularly formed for each other; gentle, harmleſs, tender, and compaſſionate, the calm current of their affections promiſed a fair and permanent felicity, by being united into one ſtream. The guardian angels of both could not have formed a wiſh more propitious to their happineſs than that of cementing an union between them.

The obliging and attentive behaviour of Eliza won ſo forcibly upon Sedgeley's affections, that he contrived a little dance on her account; and Miſs Margaret was not a little piqued at his never having given ſuch a proof of his gallantry to Roſina. On this evening Eliza looked ſo remarkably well,

well, that no one wondered at the transfer he had made of his affections from Roſina. The light brown hair of Eliza flowed in long and profuſe ringlets down her ſhoulders; and a chip hat, trimmed with pale-green ribbon, was put on with the ſimplicity of a village maid. A gown of cambrick, on which ſhe had worked roſe-buds, that appeared as if they were juſt opening their boſoms to the zephyrs of Spring, tied up in an artleſs manner, completed her dreſs.

During the progreſs of the evening's entertainment the mild character of Eliza produced a great effect upon her lover's heart; and while his tongue poured forth her praiſe in ſtrains of the warmeſt eloquence, his eyes followed her through the mazes of the dance with rapturous delight. The party being ſmall and ſelect, the uſual rotation of partners was diſpenſed with; and

he

he had the uninterrupted felicity of dancing with her the whole evening. Their mutual happineſs increaſed as the moments flew; the ardour of Sedgeley's admiration animated the features of Eliza, and gave a radiance to her charms they had never before experienced; while the kind flattery of the glaſs, which ſhe frequently conſulted, convinced her that his adulation was not improperly beſtowed.

Roſina was no longer the life and ſpirit of the company. The delay of Melford's arrival had diſſipated the fond concluſions of her mind that he would follow her; and although ſhe could not perſuade herſelf that his recent profeſſions were inſincere, yet ſhe felt all the alarm that fear could inſpire. The anxieties of ſuſpenſe lay heavy on her heart. She danced little, talked leſs, and

would willingly have indulged her cares in total ſilence, had not Mr. and Mrs. Sedgeley forced her into a painful converſation upon the ſubject of their ſon's choice, by aſſuring her how highly they approved of his attentions to Eliza, and their reſolution to encourage a reciprocal attachment.

When the dance was over, and the hour of departure arrived, Mrs. Sedgeley inſiſted that the ladies ſhould ſtay and take a bed for that night at her houſe, as her ſon had ſettled a party of pleaſure for the enſuing morning. Eliza acceded to the propoſal with pleaſure, and Roſina, in compliment to her, was forced to comply; but Miſs Margaret, having very unfortunately fixed on the next day for drawing off ſome gooſeberry wine, which would have been entirely ſpoiled if it had been neglected, was obliged

to

to relinquiſh the projected pleaſure. She very good-naturedly, however, perſuaded the girls to ſtay, and promiſed to apologize for it to the Vicar on her return home. But we ſhall take the liberty of ſtepping before her to the Vicarage, to relate a ſcene which had paſſed during her abſence.

CHAP. XXVIII.

THE SURPRISE.

As the Vicar was returning from his evening ramble, he obſerved two gentlemen on horſeback, followed by their ſervants, galloping with great violence along the road towards the Vicarage. He ſtopped to take a nearer ſurvey of them; but his joy on diſcovering that one of them was his ſon-in-law, Captain Manning, was converted

verted into aſtoniſhment and conſternation when he perceived the other was Captain Melford, the baſe inſulter of his daughter's virtue.

Indignation ſeized all the faculties of his ſoul; he turned precipitately acroſs a field into a bye-path, and reaching the Vicarage before them, haſtened into the parlour in painful diſcompoſure. They arrived; and while the horſes were led into the yard, Manning entered the houſe alone. The Vicar received him with all the cordiality of pure affection; but after making ſome enquiries of the health and happineſs of his daughter, the idea of ſeeing Melford enter occurred to his mind, and he relapſed into his former diſquietude. Manning, perceiving the change, attributed it to its true cauſe, and told him that his friend was waiting without, not daring to approach till

he received from him the welcome of kindneſs and hoſpitality. The Vicar continued ſilent. Melford was ſtanding at the door, pretending to be buſy in giving directions about the horſes, but his eyes were turned towards the parlour; and on receiving a ſign of invitation from Manning, he entered the room. His cheeks were crimſoned in bluſhes of confuſion; he appeared, if poſſible, more affected than the Vicar. A ſilence of ſome minutes enſued, which was at length interrupted by Melford, who, approaching Mr. Ouſeley, thus addreſſed him:—

"I cannot, Sir, again enter this hoſpitable dwelling, from which I once feared my preſumptuous follies had baniſhed me for ever, without feeling the deepeſt confuſion. The bold and licentious extent to which the impulſes of unthinking vanity have hurried

hurried me, may appear to impeach the integrity of my character; and I candidly confeſs that among the variety of events which have combined to deprive me of your good opinion, there are ſome which but too juſtly call for your ſevereſt indignation. The reproaches of my own heart, and the coldneſs of your reception, convince me of the enormity of my tranſgreſſion. To vindicate my conduct is impoſſible; and if I were to attempt a palliation, by explaining the circumſtances which acted like ſpells upon my mind, and led me into error, I ſhould betray a want of manly generoſity that would increaſe the nature of my offence. From the native benevolence of your diſpoſition, therefore, and from the ſincerity of my own contrition, I can alone hope for pardon. The intoxications of youth and pleaſure may have miſled my mind, but I

am perſuaded they have not corrupted my heart. Introduced at too early a period into all the faſhionable diſſipations of life, and perhaps poſſeſſing from nature a wild and volatile temper, I ruſhed with heedleſs impetuoſity into the vortex of ſenſual gratification; but in the maddeſt career of folly, Reaſon frequently interpoſed her powerful voice, and ſeverely condemned the exceſſes into which the intemperance of my paſſions plunged me. The reign of giddy youth is now over; I have learned wiſdom from experience, which, like the ſkill of the phyſician, while it diſcloſes the danger of the malady, points out the moſt probable means of cure. If my mind does not cruelly deceive me, I am perſuaded that I ſhall no longer tread the fatal path which has miſled me. The ſincerity of my repentance will, I truſt, procure me your forgiveneſs; and

be

be aſſured it will be the felicity of my future life to merit your approbation and applauſe. The certainty of my happineſs or my miſery is now at your diſpoſal; this is the awful criſis of my fate. The adverſities which I have hitherto experienced, I have borne with compoſure, and ſubmitted to with reſignation; but a diſappointment of my preſent hopes would fill my ſoul with bitterneſs, and entail a corroding ſorrow upon the remainder of my life. Do then, dear Sir, let your conſent kindly beam a ray of comfort to my hopes; caſt the veil of oblivion over what has paſſed; let reconciliation aſſure me that I may hope for your favour and affection; and be ſatisfied that I never gave a pang to the boſom of virtue without planting a more painful dagger in my own."

Melford then acquainted the Vicar of the perfect reconciliation which had taken place between Francis and him; and, declaring the fervency of his paſſion for Roſina, continued, in the moſt importunate manner, to ſolicit his conſent and approbation.

The Vicar's breaſt heaved with the tumult of contending paſſions while Melford was addreſſing him. His feelings were too great to be concealed. Tears trickled for ſome time in quick ſucceſſion down his cheeks; when, ſuddenly catching hold of the extended hand of Melford—"Enough!" he exclaimed; "you have ſaid all that a man of ſenſe and honour can ſay. The all-perfect and benevolent Being who ſurveys the hearts of mortals, receives the repenting child of error with joy into his boſom. Shall I then refuſe contrition its reward? He who hopes himſelf to be forgiven, ſhould

learn

learn to forgive the faults of others. The hand of Providence has preſerved my olive-branches from periſhing; they now flouriſh under the protecting ſhade of his mercy and divine compaſſion. The dark clouds which once lowered deſtruction over my humble roof, are now diſperſed. In adverſity I truſt I was reſigned; in proſperity I rejoice with meekneſs. Be ſatisfied that what is paſt ſhall be obliterated for ever from my mind."

He pauſed—

A ſudden guſh of tranſport throbbing through every vein, deprived both Melford and the Vicar of the power of utterance; all the refined and ecſtatic ſenſibilities of nature crowded to their hearts; every faculty of the human ſoul was, for a moment, abſorbed by the exquiſite tenderneſs of their feelings.

Manning, by an involuntary motion, lifted his handkerchief to his eyes.

The Vicar, at length recovering, ſuddenly proceeded—

"Roſina ſhall be your's! I know every winding of her heart, and, I believe in uniting her with you, ſhe will have every chance of happineſs. She—but I will avoid retroſpection—like yourſelf, now treads the path of reformation; and be convinced, Captain Melford, however giddineſs may heretofore have warped its amiable qualities, you will ſtill find her mind the ſeat of innocence, and her heart the ſhrine of virtuous ſenſibility. The moſt important cares of my life will, by this union, be accompliſhed. Bleſſed, thrice bleſſed, be that Power which, by affording felicity to my children, has placed a crown of glory as well as peace upon my aged head, encircled my grey locks with

with wreaths of joy, and given me a ſtaff of comfort to ſupport and ſtrengthen my wearied footſteps in their paſſage to the grave!"

This affecting apoſtrophe was followed by an univerſal ſilence. At length the Vicar, recovering from his reverie, deſired Captain Manning to ſit by his ſide.—" How is the health of your good mother? Is my little Lydia happy and in good ſpirits? Is the Doctor and his wife well?" ſaid the Vicar.

As theſe enquiries diverted the converſation from the ſubject which was the moſt intereſting and important to Melford's feelings, he aſked the Vicar, with a look of diſappointment, if he might not be permitted to ſee the ladies. The Vicar, recollecting that he ought to have announced their abſence before, expreſſed great mortification

fication in being obliged to tell Melford that they were out.

"Out!" repeated Melford with an emphaſis and ſurpriſe. "Pray, Sir, whither are they gone?"

The Vicar then informed his viſitors of Sedgeley's gallantry; and hinted, in pretty plain terms to Manning, that he believed the ladies were obliged to his ſiſter Eliza for the invitation they had received.

Melford earneſtly requeſted that Manning would immediately accompany him to Sedgeley's houſe; but Manning raiſed a thouſand objections to a conduct ſo precipitate and improper. Melford entreated him then to ſend a meſſage announcing their arrival; but he ſtarted the ſame objections, and Melford was forced to ſubmit with patience to the unaccommodating opinions of his friend. The truth was, that Manning wiſhed to

contrive ſome little plot for the meeting of the lovers, which this premature intelligence of their arrival would have entirely deſtroyed.

The fatigue of the long journey they had taken, the ſolemnity of the converſation which had enſued, and the mortification of not immediately beholding Roſina, and hearing from herſelf the ratification of his wiſhes, ſo totally overpowered Melford, that ſoon after the ſupper was over, he betrayed ſtrong ſymptoms of wearineſs. Being aſſured that the ladies would not return till it was extremely late, he at length therefore complied with the Vicar's preſſing entreaties of retiring to his chamber. Manning, after ſome private converſation with the Vicar, was alſo perſuaded to retire to reſt; and the Vicar was left alone to the indulgence of his meditations till the ladies ſhould arrive.

The

The Vicar was a little diſappointed when he found that his ſiſter returned alone; ſhe was equally ſurpriſed at finding her brother up, contrary to his uſual cuſtom. There was ſomething myſterious in the circumſtance, and ſhe began to queſtion him concerning the cauſe of it, ſaying he muſt have been very loneſome during ſo many hours.—"Not ſo loneſome as you imagine, Margaret; I have been entertained with very agreeable company."

"Mr. Collins, I ſuppoſe; but he did not ſtay long here, I am ſure, when he found that we were from home."

"It was not Mr. Collins, I aſſure you," replied the Vicar. "Now, Margaret, ſet all your wits to work to diſcover who it was."

She mentioned two or three characters in the

the neighbourhood who occaſionally viſited the Vicar.

"Suppoſe," ſaid the Vicar, "it was a relation—ſuppoſe it was a friend—ſuppoſe it was two Officers who came to be billeted here."

"Oh, as I hope to be ſaved," cried ſhe, "it is Melford and Manning. Captain Melford come to marry Roſina!"

The Vicar ſmiled.

"I always knew this," continued ſhe, ſtarting from her chair, and overturning it; "the lines of good luck were always evident in my niece's countenance."

"Deuce take your chair, Margaret!" exclaimed the Vicar; "it has broken my ſhins."

"Lord, brother, I am in ſuch a flurry!" continued Miſs Margaret. "Tell me, brother, tell me all he ſaid—ſweet, dear fellow!

ſellow! I would not have miſſed ſuch a ſcene for all the world! Lord, Lord, what a ſituation Roſina will be in when ſhe hears of his arrival! He will make a noble ſettlement on her, I warrant you. She ſhall come down once a year, I proteſt, in her coach and four to the village with two footmen at leaſt, to viſit Mrs. Norris and the neighbours."

"Take care of your apron, Margaret," ſaid the Vicar.—She had given herſelf ſo many twirls, that the fire had ſinged a corner of it.

"Well, well," ſaid ſhe, "I don't grudge this corner, though it is my beſt Bruſſels pattern, for it is an indubitable ſign of a wedding; but where is the dear fellow? Let me fly to him."

"Oh! ſtop, ſtop, Margaret, he is juſt gone to reſt."

"To-bed

"To-bed he may be gone, brother, but not to reſt. He who experiences all the tumults of love—all the reſtleſs anxieties of that tender paſſion—all—in ſhort, brother, it is a contradiction in nature to ſay a man in love can ſleep; ſo I inſiſt on going immediately to ſee him."

The Vicar was obliged to interpoſe his commands, or Miſs Margaret would certainly have diſturbed Melford by a viſit. She then inſiſted that an expreſs ſhould be immediately diſpatched for Roſina; but the Vicar made her acquainted with the ſcheme which Manning had concerted of ſurpriſing his ſiſter-in-law by the ſudden appearance of her lover; and Miſs Margaret was at length, with ſome difficulty, perſuaded to retire to her chamber.

The influence of habit, however, is not eaſily removed; and it had been the uniform

practice

practice of Miſs Margaret's life to carry all the inclinations of her mind, by one mean or another, into execution. The idea, therefore, which had ſuggeſted itſelf of paying Melford a viſit accompanied her to her chamber; and the flutter of joy which his arrival afforded, prevented her from ſeeing its impropriety. The Vicar's objections had proceeded upon the fear of diſturbing his reſt; but as ſhe was convinced of the impoſſibility of a lover being able to ſleep, this reaſon appeared idle and unſatisfactory. Theſe reflections paſſed in her mind while ſhe was undreſſing; and by the time ſhe was almoſt prepared to ſtep into bed, had worked ſo powerful an effect, that ſhe ſuddenly reſolved at all events to pay Melford a charitable viſit, and endeavour, by her ſocial converſe, to chaſe away the dark and diſmal

hours

hours in which ſhe fancied he would otherwiſe paſs the night.

She proceeded accordingly towards the room in which he lay; but having reached the door, a ſentiment of delicacy occurred, and ſtopped her ingreſs. She debated with herſelf upon the propriety of this meaſure for ſome time. To afford quietude and comfort to the reſtleſs ſpirit of a lover was an act of pious charity; beſides, he was the lover of her niece, and that circumſtance alone, ſhe thought, was ſufficient to remove all imputation of indecorum. At length, the idea of promoting the moſt eſſential intereſts of Roſina, by ſeizing this opportunity to perſuade Melford to make her a handſome allowance in pin-money, conquered every ſcruple, and ſhe entered the room.—All was ſilent.—She doubted whether to advance or retreat. During this

ſtate

ſtate of ſuſpenſe a favourite cat, which had followed Miſs Margaret into the room, leaped ſuddenly on the bed, and began to play with one of Melford's curls. He awoke.—"What confounded thing are you?" ſaid he, ſtarting up, and catching her by the throat. The cat ſqualled, and he flung it off the bed.

A voice, like the breezes of the Spring, broke unexpectedly upon his ear.—"My dear Captain Melford, excuſe this intruſion," cried Miſs Margaret; "pardon the liberty I have taken, and believe that it originates from good-nature alone. I pitied you by all the powers of ſympathy."

Melford, more aſleep than awake, did not recollect her voice. "By all the powers of conjuration," exclaimed he, "who or what are you?"

"It is your aunt Margery that is to be, Captain Melford," ſhe continued; "I knew you

you could not ſleep, and ſo I determined to viſit you. Your affections are fixed, and therefore there cannot be any impropriety in it. Beſides, the world knows the ſteadineſs of my principles, and it alſo knows," added ſhe with a laugh, "that Brutus is an honourable man."

"My dear Madam," cried Melford, "you are extremely obliging; but I muſt requeſt it of you, as a ſingular favour, that you will not deprive yourſelf of reſt on my account."

"Don't be too much agitated," cried ſhe, ſitting down beſide the bed, and laying her candle on a table while ſhe opened the curtains.

He entreated her to return to her chamber.

"Pray keep yourſelf quiet," ſaid ſhe, "though I know the palpitations inſeparable from

from ſuch a ſtate as your's. Ah Captain Melford, how many will envy you! Such a girl as Roſina is not the fortunate lot of every one. Well, after all, though I am her aunt, I muſt ſay it is not often one ſees the like of her; take her all in all, you will ſcarcely find one equal to her. And then, beſides her external perfections, her internal worth, her taſte for works of ingenuity—ſhe is, I aſſure you, the beſt hand in the world at a piece of patch-work, and none can ſurpaſs her in the deſign of a fire-ſcreen. Take my word, while I am with you, your houſe ſhall be noticed for pickles and preſerves; and, without boaſting, I can, out of my own wardrobe, make your wife as fine a bride as any that has been in the country theſe twenty years: my bloom-coloured ſilk and flowered chintz ſhall be her's immediately. Beſides theſe, I have

moſs,

moſs, ſhells, and feathers to ornament a room with after the plan of the Lady in the World. There ſhall be an alcove at the upper end; and, if you know a ſkilful artificer, he may eaſily execute a ſmall Cupid, which we can adorn with the plumage of a peacock's tail, and give into his hands a blue curtain to ſupport. Ah. Captain Melford! though my brother is but a poor Vicar, our family was once very reſpectable. There were a number of us; I was the youngeſt, and ſtyled the roſe-bud. A young gentleman in the neighbourhood, a fine fellow, like yourſelf, Captain Melford, uſed to bring me fruit and flowers. He was pronounced my lover; and when he ſaw me beckon to him from the bow-window, he would plunge, ſhoes and all, into the river, which ran acroſs the meadow. I called him my Leander, and he would ſay, 'My ſweet

ſoul, were the river deep enough, and it were poſſible, I would drown myſelf ten thouſand times, and each time think myſelf happier than Leander in dying for one ſo infinitely ſuperior to Hero."

Captain Manning, who ſlept in an adjoining room, was awakened by the loud clack of Margaret's tongue; and, unable to ſuggeſt from whence it could proceed at that late hour, reſolved to find out what it was that had diſturbed his repoſe. Groping in the dark for Melford's apartment, from whence he thought the ſounds proceeded, he ſtumbled.—"As I live," ſaid Melford, "there is Manning breaking his bones."

Manning, at laſt, found out Melford's door. "What confounded noiſe is this you are making?" cried he.

"Huſh!" ſaid Melford; "you don't know whom I have got with me."

Miſs

Miſs Margaret, on hearing his voice, inſtantly ruſhed forward. "My dear nephew," exclaimed ſhe, "you are welcome, extremely welcome to the Vicarage. You are ſurpriſed, I am ſure, to find me here; but certain that Captain Melford could not ſleep, I came to ſit with him."

"How exceſſively good-natured you are!" ſaid Manning.

"For mercy's ſake, my dear Manning," whiſpered Melford, "carry her off with you; my head is diſtracted with her clatter, and I can neither get up or lie down while ſhe continues here."

"Oh, if I do," ſaid Manning, "may I be bleſſed myſelf with the felicity of her company! Captain Melford, Madam," he continued, "declares you have laid him under everlaſting obligations by this proof of your regard; you could not have acted in

a more charitable manner. When I lived in the barracks with him, I have known him obliged to get the fifer of the regiment to compoſe his ſpirits when in bed: how much more powerful then muſt be the ſoft notes which fall from a lady's tongue!"—He then made a ſpeedy retreat; and Melford's head, which he had vainly endeavoured to ſupport, ſunk in ſleep upon the pillow.

"Leander," continued Miſs Margaret, "went out one day to ſhoot grouſe; he had juſt fired, when——do you hear?—"

"Umph!" ſaid Melford.

"He had juſt fired, I ſay——Lord bleſs me, you are not attending!"—She now perceived that Melford was aſleep.—"Well," ſaid ſhe, "I find that love will not preſerve us from being mortal. If Sedgeley were here, he would be very apt to ſay that

Morpheus

Morpheus had mixed his poppies amongſt the roſe-buds of Cupid."—She then took her candle, and repaired to her chamber.

CHAP. XXIX.

TRANQUILITY RESTORED.

THE Vicar aroſe by the firſt dawn of day, and, ordering Suſan to be routed up, diſpatched her to Sedgeley's to beg Miſs Roſina's company at home directly:—"But I charge you, Suſan," ſays he, "not to give her

the ſmalleſt hint of what has paſſed during her abſence."

"Why no, to be ſure, Sir, if you deſire not."

"And if I find you mind me, Suſan, you ſhall have ſomething as a reward for your ſilence, I aſſure you."

"What, Sir?" aſked Suſan with a look of eager expectation.

"Why, I will give you a new hymn-book."

"Oh Lord, Sir!" exclaimed Suſan, diſappointed.

"And perhaps," added the Vicar, "a new ribbon with it."

"Lord! Sir, you can't doubt my veracity. By my truly, I won't tell a ſyllable of the matter."—When her maſter's back was turned, Suſan looked into the glaſs to ſee if her

her cap was prettily put on, and then tripped away.

Upon her arrival at Sedgeley's ſhe met Willy, the gardener, at the gate. "So, Mrs. Suſan," ſaid he, "where are you going this morning as ſweet and as freſh as a roſe? 'Tis a marvellous fine thing to ſee you now-a-days."

"Don't aſk me any queſtions, Willy," cried ſhe, "and you'll get no rude anſwers. I want to go to my young lady, ſo pray don't keep me here."—There was ſufficient room for her to have paſſed at the other ſide of the gate, but ſhe did not pretend to ſee it, and Willy paid her ſome more ruſtic compliments.

"Come, my ſweet little Suſy," ſaid he, "let us ſtroll into the garden; 'tis a long time ſince I had the pleaſure of giving you any fruit. There is one plum-tree old

Madam has been nurſing up, but it ſhall go hard if you and I can't get at it."

Young Sedgeley at this moment made his appearance; and Suſan proceeded to the houſe.

Eliza was walking in the garden; Roſina was ſtill in bed; and Suſan was ſhewed up to her room.

"Has any thing happened at home, Suſan," ſaid Roſina, "to bring you here ſo early?"

"Happened, Ma'am?" repeated Suſan, with a ſimper; "Oh nothing, Ma'am! but maſter has a power of things to tell you, and begs you will return home directly."

"I am ſure ſomething has paſſed, or he would never ſend for me in this manner."

"Why do you ſuppoſe ſo?" ſaid Suſan. "But pray, Miſs Roſina, did you dream of a looking-glaſs laſt night? If you did, I ſhall

ſhall certainly ſay it was a ſign of your ſeeing ſome one this morning you don't expect."

"Tell me," ſaid Roſina, "I deſire you, what is the meaning of all this?"

"Oh lud!" cried ſhe, "I ſhall break my word—no, by my truly, but I will not. Yet, to be ſure, I know—to be ſure, I know where ſomebody is. His eyes are as bright as the day, and his coat is as fine as fine can be, and he would give a purſe of gold for one peep at you."

"Tell me," ſaid Roſina, ſitting up, and laying her trembling hand on Suſan's, with a look that almoſt frightened the poor girl, "tell me, I conjure you, tell me, is not Captain Melford at my father's houſe?"

"Lord, what a gueſs you have!" cried Suſan.

Roſina fell back on her pillow; a variety of contending emotions danced in quick ſucceſſion through her heart, and quite overcame her. Her colour faded, and ſhe appeared fainting. Suſan, alarmed at her ſituation, cried out, "Oh ſhe is dying!" and wrung her hands in great agony.—"'Tis I have done all this miſchief," ſaid ſhe, "and my maſter will kill me!"

A torrent of tears came fortunately to the relief of Roſina. She wept, laughed, and talked alternately for ſome moments, without being perfectly ſenſible of what ſhe was doing. The firſt tumults of joy and ſurpriſe ſubſiding, ſhe aroſe, and deſired Suſan to aſſiſt her in dreſſing, that ſhe might not loſe a minute of that time which was now become ſo valuable to her happineſs.

Eliza, though ſhe particularly rejoiced on every account at the arrival of her

brother and Captain Melford, felt a little mortified, though ſhe would not confeſs it, at being obliged to defer the projected rambling party with Sedgeley,

——— ——— ——— "not unſeen,
"Through hedge-row elms and alleys green."

Fancy had formed a ſcene of the moſt romantic pleaſure in her mind, from the rural perambulation which young Sedgeley had propoſed; and ſhe returned to the Vicarage with reluctance and mortification. The boſom of Roſina, on the contrary, beat with the higheſt pulſe of joy; her eyes ſparkled with emanations of delight; and ſhe flew toward her native home with nervous alacrity. Upon her approaching the houſe, however, ſhe recollected the triumph which this diſcovery of her feelings might afford to the haughty and unconquered

ſpirit of her lover; and, calling all the powers of diſſimulation to her aid, endeavoured to aſſume an air of compoſure and indifference as ſhe entered the room. The Vicar, who was alone, received her with a ſmile ſo cordially ſignificant, that if ſhe had been ignorant of what it omened, ſhe might with certainty have propheſied there was

——————" joyful news at hand.
" His boſom's Lord ſat lightly on his throne,
" And all the time, an unaccuſtom'd ſpirit
" Lifted him above the ground with cheerful thoughts."
ROMEO and JULIET.

" Well, Roſina," cried the Vicar as he claſped her hand, " I hope you were entertained by your amuſements yeſterday evening?"

" Oh! extremely indeed," replied Roſina.

" Could

"Could it not have been increaſed by the preſence of ſome one perſon who was not there?"

"Yes, Sir," replied Roſina, "your preſence would have completed my happineſs."—Conſcience upbraided her as ſhe ſpoke; and a bluſh of confuſion accompanied the diſſembling indifference, by which ſhe hoped to conceal the tumult of joy that revelled in her breaſt.

"You are a little hypocrite, I am ſure," cried the Vicar, tapping her cheek, "and muſt be ſeverely puniſhed for this affectation." The Vicar immediately left the room.

The ſolitude to which his ſudden departure left Roſina, would have more than ſurpriſed her upon any other occaſion; but ſhe ſuſpected that it was a prelude to ſome little plot which, from Suſan's intelligence, ſhe conjectured,

conjectured, was intended to be formed. The abſence of her aunt and Melford ſtrengthened the idea; and ſhe waited for a ſhort time in expectation of the *denouement*, amidſt a conflict of the tendereſt paſſions. Finding, however, that if any plot was in agitation, it was not yet ripe for execution, ſhe ſtole ſoftly up ſtairs to Eliza, adjuſted her dreſs, which, from the early hour of the morning, had been careleſſly huddled on, looked in the glaſs for a few moments, pulled off her hat, undid her hair, dreſſed it again, burſt into an immoderate fit of laughter, wept with violent agony, dried her tears, laughed again, and peſtered poor Eliza with an inceſſant rotation of ſilly and tormenting queſtions.

While theſe affections were driving the nerves of Roſina to the brink of hyſterics, Melford, rendered drowſy by the agitations

of

of his mind, and the interruptions of Miſs Margaret's viſit, was enjoying the ſweets of a temporary ſlumber, his mind occupied by dreams of heavenly delight. Suddenly a violent noiſe, occaſioned by the fall of a pile of band-boxes which Roſina had thrown down in the hurry of ſearching for a favourite cap, awakened him. Starting up in his bed, under an expectation that Miſs Margaret and her purring attendant were paying him a ſecond viſit, he drew back the curtains, and perceived the ſunbeams dancing in the room. They ſilently upbraided his ſupineneſs; and haſtily quitting his pillow, he prepared himſelf to ſee the dear object of his heart. Juſt as he had finiſhed dreſſing, he thought he heard the pattering of female feet deſcending the ſtairs. He opened the door, and caught a glimpſe of Roſina. He inſtantly followed her;

her; and they both entered the parlour-door at the ſame inſtant of time. Their mutual agitations diſcovered the violence of their feelings. Roſina vainly endeavoured to conceal her emotions; her eyes betrayed the ſecret of her heart, and the warm bluſhes which tinged her cheeks were, to a man of Melford's diſcernment, the unerring evidence of love. He gazed upon her for a few moments in ſpeechleſs ecſtacy; then bowing obſequiouſly towards her, and aſſuming an air of gaiety, he aſked her with a ſaucy ſmile, if Merlin's ſpell hung over her that morning? She affected to frown; but the impulſe of nature was irreſiſtible, and ſhe burſt into a fit of laughter.

He caught her hand.—"Oh Roſina!" ſaid he, "what words ſhall paint my tranſport? Every unhappy difference is now obliterated;

obliterated; and, by parental authority, I am to call you mine."

"Really," ſaid ſhe; "upon my word, this is very extraordinary; your company is quite unexpected, and my father——"

"Said you were mine," cried Melford, interrupting her. "Do not trifle, therefore, my Roſina, but declare that his words are the words of truth."

"No, no, Captain Melford, you ſhall never again have occaſion to accuſe me of imprudence, I aſſure you; nor without the immediate ſanction of my father's preſence, will I——"

"Thus then," ſaid he, ſnatching her hand which ſhe had withdrawn, "I ſeize your beauteous hand as the pledge of eternal amity and increaſing love. From this propitious hour, regiſtered may it be in the annals of felicity! The era of my happineſs commences

commences in calling you, by his conſent, for ever mine."

"Then be ſatisfied, Captain Melford," ſaid ſhe, while a gentle tear ſtole down her cheek, "that ſince neither reaſon, prudence nor parental authority oppoſe my choice, every wiſh of my heart is gratified in giving you my hand."

At this critical moment the Vicar precipitately entered the parlour. Tears found a ready paſſage down his cheeks; and he folded their united hands to his joyful boſom.

"Happy, happy pair!" he cried in affectionate tranſports. "Your union beams with the faireſt proſpects of felicity. Leſſons, derived from experience, have taught you the ineſtimable value of prudence and virtue. You have learned precepts of true wiſdom in the ſchool of adverſity. The pains

pains you have both felt from the conſequences of folly, have opened your eyes to the dangers of that wildneſs on the one hand, and levity on the other, which caſt ſo deep a ſhade over the native purity of your hearts. Convinced of your errors, you will avoid their repetition. The bright faculties of your minds, now unobſcured, will riſe up to fulfil the noble purpoſes for which they were originally deſigned, and you will become good and uſeful members of ſociety. Thrice fortunate are they, who by timely efforts ſtart, uncontaminated, from the quickſands of folly, and the gulph of vice. Providence will extend its ſupporting hand to cheer the labours of returning virtue; beſtow courage to reſiſt, and fortitude to bear, the pains and dangers of the glorious toil. The light of heaven will every moment break upon their progreſs, diſpel the gloom

gloom which hides the thorny maze of error, and place before their view the bright primroſe path of truth and virtue.

The continuation of this preceptive and affectionate addreſs was interrupted by the appearance of Miſs Margaret, who ruſhed ſuddenly into the room half frantic with joy. She embraced her niece with oppreſſive ecſtacy; laughed, cried, and ſeemed ſcarcely ſenſible of what ſhe was about. She ran violently and with rapture toward Melford to kiſs him; but recollecting herſelf in time, ſtopped ſuddenly ſhort: he, however, with great gallantry, inſiſted on taking what ſhe ſeemed ſo willing to give.

She apologized to him for the diſturbance of her nocturnal viſit, aſſuring him that it proceeded from good-nature alone. This produced an explanation; and the Vicar would certainly have given her a ſevere lecture

lecture upon the impropriety of her conduct, had not Melford contrived to divert his mind to another ſubject of converſation. She could not refrain, however, from whiſpering her brother, that though he might be diſpleaſed at her conduct, ſhe was certain her viſit would be of infinite advantage to Roſina, by contributing to increaſe the ſettlement which ſhe had ſo fully impreſſed the neceſſity of on Melford's mind.

The Vicar ſmiled at the extravagance of her affectionate zeal.

Manning and his ſiſter now entered the room; the latter tenderly embraced Roſina, expreſſed her happineſs at the reception Melford had met with, and, after the uſual enquiries had paſſed, they all ſat down to breakfaſt.

A ſmile of ſatisfaction wantoned in every face. Hints on every ſide had been very freely

freely circulated relative to Eliza and young Sedgeley. Melford, who ſtill delighted in a little miſchief, turned gravely to the bluſhing girl.—" I am very ſorry, Ma'am," cried he, " that at this happy juncture we are to loſe the pleaſure of your company."

" To loſe my company!" ſaid Eliza, turning pale, " why?"

" Mrs. Manning declares ſhe cannot exiſt a moment longer without ſeeing you, and inſiſted that the chariot ſhould follow us to take you home."

" Are you ſerious?" exclaimed Eliza.

" Yes," interpoſed her brother, " he is certainly ſerious. You can have no objection to return home with me; Lydia is longing to ſee you."

" Surely I hear the carriage," ſaid Melford, ſtarting from his ſeat; and, in fact, his

his phaeton, which he had ordered to follow him, now appeared driving up the road.

Manning, perceiving that his ſiſter was deeply affected, ſmiled, and convinced her it was all a jeſt; while Eliza, trembling with confuſion, wiped away her tears. Sedgeley at this inſtant made his appearance; he was introduced to the gentlemen, and with a diffident air preſented his mother's compliments to the company, hoping that it would not be diſagreeable to them to pay her a viſit, and purſue the little ſcheme of rural pleaſure which he had planned the preceding night.

The ſpirits of the party were all tuned to harmony, and they complied without heſitation. Every thing was adjuſted in a moment; but before they could ſet off, the good lady herſelf drove to the door in a cabriole chair and a pair of ponies. Miſs Margaret

Margaret was offered a place in it; but her ambitious views aimed at procuring a ſeat in Melford's phaeton, and nothing elſe would ſatisfy her. This unexpected interlopement cruelly diſappointed the inclinations of both Roſina and Melford, whoſe minds had been anticipating the pleaſures of the *tête-à-tête* which the phaeton would afford. Before Miſs Margaret, therefore, had perfectly ſeated herſelf, Melford gave his ſpirited horſes a ſly cut with the whip, which ſet them on prancing and curvetting to ſo violent a degree, that he alarmed the fears of his fair intruder.

"Bleſs me, Madam," cried Melford, "I hope you are not apt to be frightened! The horſes are now and then inclined to be reſtive to be ſure; but I'll manage them—I'll teach them to prance." He then gave them a more ſevere cut, under pretence of making them

them ſtand ſtill; but, inſtead of permitting it to produce that effect, he made them, by checking the reins, only plunge and rear more dreadfully. "Let me get out," cried Miſs Margaret, "let me get out directly! I would not venture my neck with two ſuch furious devils for all the world."—The horſes ſtood very complaiſantly ſtill while Miſs Margaret alighted; and ſhe endeavoured to diſſuade Roſina from taking her place, ſaying, that Melford would certainly break her neck.

"If I do," replied he, as Roſina ſeated herſelf by his ſide, "I ſhall be more unfortunate than Phæton;" and the carriage wheeled away.

In their way to Sedgeley's, they were obliged to paſs the ſkirts of the grove where ſo critical a ſcene had formerly engaged them. Roſina bluſhed; a higher colour

 fluſhed

fluſhed the cheeks of Melford, who taking her hand by a ſort of inſtinctive ſympathy, exclaimed, "Oh my Roſina! you may gueſs my feelings when I compare the preſent with the paſt—when I indulge the ſweet idea of calling you honourably mine, and remember the notions which once diſgraced my mind."

The place to which they repaired was a romantic valley, in which were natural receſſes formed by the thick branches of trees entwined together; a babbling brook ran through its bottom, and birds ſung in every buſh. A cold collation had been here previouſly prepared; and Sedgeley, who adored every thing which bore the leaſt ſimilitude to Arcadian ſcenes, had provided muſic. When the repaſt was over, he led off the dance with Eliza, on a green

and

and level ſpot of ground, well choſen for the purpoſe.

The fineſt frenzy of poetic imagination never formed a ſcene of pleaſure more enchanting and ſublime than that which warmed the hearts of this rural party; and they continued to enjoy their happineſs till the moon had ſhed the ſilver of her beams upon all around. They then repaired to Sedgeley's to ſupper, where Hoſpitality and her handmaid Cheerfulneſs preſided at the board.

CHAP. XXX.

THE CONCLUSION.

FAME reſounded through the country the approaching nuptials of Melford and Roſina, and called the hiſſing ſnakes of Envy from their dark retreats; but Love and Virtue ſoared regardleſs of their envenomed tongues, and reached the heights of earthly happineſs. The Hymeneal day only waited for the arrival of their friends; and, on their return from Sedgeley's, letters were

were immediately diſpatched with preſſing entreaties that they would haſten to the Vicarage. The tedious interval of expectation was enlivened by the exertions of that charming talent which Captain Manning peculiarly poſſeſſed, of beguiling time, and rendering all around him happy.

Manning's mother, his wife, Francis and Maria, together with ſome other friends, ſoon arrived; and the joy of the Vicar and his ſiſter, on being once more ſurrounded by his family, was ſo great, that they entirely forgot the impoſſibility of accommodating them all with beds, until the hour of reſt brought it to their minds. This difficulty, however, after producing ſome pleaſantry, was obviated by the hoſpitality of Mrs. Sedgeley, who immediately ordered the neceſſary proviſions to be made, and entertained her gueſts with willing cordiality.

This kindneſs was not altogether diſintereſted; ſhe thought that her civility might promote the happineſs of her beloved ſon, to which, ſhe juſtly conceived, there was nothing more eſſential than his union with Eliza. Influenced by this idea, ſhe ſeized the firſt favourable opportunity of diſcloſing her ſentiments to Mrs. Manning. An interview between the old folks was appointed upon the ſubject; and their propoſals were ſo extremely liberal and open, that both Captain Manning and his mother immediately ſignified their conſent. On queſtioning Eliza concerning the ſtate of her heart, ſhe candidly confeſſed her partiality for Sedgeley; and Manning declared it was his intention to give her the fortune he had always promiſed her, if ſhe married with his approbation. Young Sedgeley was accordingly introduced, and Eliza, like her lover's favourite, Lavinia,

" all

" all in ſweet diſorder loſt," bluſhed compliance to his wiſhes.

Hymen again attended the altar with his double torch. Sedgeley was firſt married to Eliza; and the hour in which the Vicar performed the ceremony, and united his darling child to the beloved object of her affection, left him without one worldly wiſh ungratified. He, whoſe happineſs had uniformly been to relieve the ſuffering offſpring of virtuous indigence, was now enabled to rejoice at the felicity of his own. May ſuch ever be the reward of virtue!

The extravagance of joy which aſſailed the ears of poor Miſs Margaret from every quarter, totally deranged her ideas; and ſhe was from morning till night immerſed in a fruitleſs buſtle of her own making.

The Vicarage, indeed, exhibited ſuch a ſcene of jocund pleaſure and refined delight,

that the excurſive freedom of a fertile fancy can alone do juſtice to the joy which ſprung in every breaſt, and burſt from every tongue. The recent nuptials of the double pair introduced a remembrance of the ſimilar ceremonies which Manning and Lydia, Francis and Maria, had before performed, and filled their mind with correſpondent felicity. It was the propitious reign of Hymen; and thoſe imaginations which parental fondneſs, and the comforts of connubial love inſpire, will form a picture of delight, from the preſent ſituation of the Vicar and his family, which the puny powers of deſcription would vainly endeavour to delineate. , The anxieties of his virtuous heart for the proſperity of his children, were gratified equal to his warmeſt wiſh, and beyond his higheſt expectations; and while he beheld, with rapture, increaſing proſpects

of

of uninterrupted happineſs riſing to their view, he turned his mind with piety to Heaven, in grateful acknowledgments for the bleſſings it beſtowed.

After ſtaying a conſiderable time at the Vicarage, in kindneſs to the tender and affectionate feelings of the Vicar, who found it extremely difficult to ſeparate, the ſeveral families departed to their reſpective manſions; and as their departure will finiſh our campaign, it is neceſſary that our book, like the Temple of Janus, ſhould be cloſed. We ſhall, however, take the liberty to follow the troops we enliſted into our ſervice from the active buſtle of the field, into the privacy of *Country Quarters*, in order to recount, with greater truth and certainty, their ſeveral deſtinations.

Captain Manning, in a ſhort time, quitted the Army. His diſpoſition was too placid to reliſh the diſſipation of a military life,

and too cheerful not to cultivate the ſociety of ſprightly and rational beings. His mind formed the ſweeteſt plans of domeſtic bliſs, which the virtuous affection of Lydia contributed in every inſtance to realize. No one action of her life ever diſappointed his expectations. Time confirmed the prepoſſeſſions which truth and goodneſs, from the firſt dawnings of her youth, had eſtabliſhed in her favour; and as the hours rolled away, ſhe experienced the reward of virtue by increaſing felicity.

Francis, conformable to the wiſhes of his parent, obtained his diploma from the Univerſity of Edinburgh, and entered upon the honourable profeſſion of phyſic. He reſides conſtantly at the Vicarage; and the ſerene but florid complexion of his countenance is no bad recommendation of his ſkill in preſerving the health and conſtitution

of

of others. Mrs. Ouſeley is the young and lovely Lady Bountiful of the neighbourhood; and there is not a peaſant within the vicinity of the Vicarage, who has not ample reaſon to bleſs its inhabitants. The Vicar is ſo extravagantly fond of Maria, that he can ſcarcely bear her out of his ſight; and he frequently declares that, had his ſon and daughter claimed the celebrated flitch of bacon, he could, with honeſt truth, have given the cleareſt evidence how well they deſerved it.

Captain Melford, in the courſe of time, followed the example of his friend Manning, and diſpoſed of his commiſſion in the Army. He has built a very elegant houſe upon the moſt fertile part of his eſtate; and being ſurrounded by a ſociety of elegant and hoſpitable families, a conſtant inter-

courſe of gaiety and good-humour prevails among them. As they live near Bath, Mr. and Mrs. Melford have frequent opportunities of enjoying a little of that diſſipation, for which, perhaps, they will always retain ſome inclination. Roſina, however, adheres ſo invariably to the ſtrict line of prudence, that, during a viſit to London, ſhe never encouraged the ſmalleſt flirtation; and was once ſo much offended by the bold gallantry of a certain faſhionable Peer, who declared ſhe was the moſt charming woman his eyes ever beheld, that ſhe dreſſed herſelf the enſuing evening with ſtudied elegance, and went to a rout, where ſhe knew he would be, on purpoſe to ſhew her reſentment to him by her ſilence.

Miſs Margaret lives with her favourite niece; ſhe is as happy as her temper will permit,

mit, and endeavours to take all trouble of domeſtic concerns from the care of Roſina. She ſcolds the ſervants, who, indeed, don't much mind her, and adjuſts the etiquette of the table; ſhe is more attached than ever to her niece, and thinks no one in the world her equal.

Melford treats Miſs Margaret with great attention; he really loves her for her affection to his wife, and never teazes her, except now and then about an old beau in the neighbourhood, who divides his time between a romance and a hair-dreſſer, and with the gallantry of the French, pays indiſcriminate attention to the young and old of the fair ſex.

Sedgeley's father purchaſed the advowſon of a Church within ten miles of Lanſdowne; and the old incumbent dying ſoon after, the young Curate was promoted to the benefice.

benefice. The Parſonage is ſurrounded by a large portion of rich glebe land, adorned by Nature with beautiful tufts of trees, and improved from year to year by a ſtyle of cultivation, which evinces that its preſent poſſeſſor has no miſtaken notion of the beauties of Arcadia. In this calm retreat Sedgeley and his Eliza paſs their days in the ſweet enjoyment of mutual love. The pomps and vanities of the world have no charms to diſturb their repoſe. Content in the poſſeſſion of each other, they have all they can deſire, and their days glide happily along in uninterrupted felicity. Once, indeed, the young Curate was betrayed into a condemnation of Eliza's taſte, on her pointing out a defect in a poem of his own compoſing, which he was reading to her; but perceiving that his peeviſhneſs had occaſioned a tear to fall upon her cheek,

he

he eagerly kiſſed it away, and imploring her pardon, acknowledged, with ſubmiſſion, the ſuperiority of her judgment.

The elder Mrs. Manning divides her time between her ſon and her daughter, and is equally happy with both.

Theſe couples pay frequent viſits to the Vicar; and there are two months in the year when they all aſſemble and hold an anniverſary at his houſe, which has been enlarged for the purpoſe of entertaining them. Theſe meetings exhibit a ſublime and pleaſing picture of the delightful rewards of virtue, the ecſtacies of parental fondneſs, the tranſports of mutual love, and the bliſs of friendſhip; but to do juſtice to it, one muſt be a ſpectator of the happy ſcene. The laſt time I had the pleaſure of viſiting at the Vicarage was in ſummer, and during one of thoſe annual jubilees. I found

found the family in the garden, ſeated in the receſs which has before been mentioned. The Vicar leaned againſt the ſtump of a tree, on which the initials of his wife's name are carved. A girl, with the face of a cherub, ſat in his lap, and his hand reſted on the head of a little curled pated urchin who ſmiled at his knee. Two or three prattling little beings were playing about the walks, and running after butterflies.

The Vicar appeared to be engaged in an intereſting diſcourſe; and I caught the laſt ſentence of it as I approached the receſs.

"Still, my children, for in that light I regard you all," ſaid he, "ſtill continue to temper the warm impulſes of proſperity by the ſedateneſs of reaſon and reflection. Let a refined and true morality pervade your minds, while its great bulwark, the Chriſtian Religion, occupies your hearts. So ſhall you

you inſure the continuation of your happineſs, or be prepared to meet thoſe viciſſitudes of fortune, which no human penetration can foreſee, or prudence prevent, with calm conſtancy, and pious reſignation."

Juſt as I had reached the receſs, Miſs Margaret, attended by a ſervant, carrying a large cake, overtook me. She introduced it to her viſitors with very high encomiums on its goodneſs; and as an incontrovertible proof of it, ſhe aſſured them it was made by the receipt they had ſo frequently heard her mention, which had deſcended to her from her great-aunt, Mrs. Frankley. It was accordingly tried; experience confirmed what had been promiſed in its favour; and fame, by eſtabliſhing its reputation, contributed to deſtroy, in a very ſhort time, the very exiſtence of Miſs Margaret's cake.

The

The fineſt conceptions that ever bleſſed the "painter's pencil, or the poet's pen," could not exceed the beauty of the preſent ſcene. The glorious ſun, in the brighteſt effulgence, was approaching towards the horizon, while the gentle breezes of the evening ſtole amidſt its rays, and tempered the air with refreſhing coolneſs. The rich gifts of Pomona hung in great abundance upon every tree. The variegated carpet of her ſiſter Flora enamelled the ground. On one ſide of the meadow, beyond the garden, a group of joyful labourers, reſting from their daily toils, ſat beneath the friendly ſhade of an overſpreading beech-tree. On the other ſide was diſcovered the old cottager, now grown very infirm, enjoying the evening of his day, under the ſhelter of his favourite hawthorn; his grandſon was playing on a fiddle by his ſide, not ſo much

for

for the amuſement of the company, as to pleaſe a young laſs among the group of labourers, whoſe ruſtic charms had touched his heart. The Vicar told us it would certainly be a match, and that he meant ſhortly to try what he could do for them to promote their happineſs.

The cheerful notes of the fiddle ſoon tempted ſome of the party to keep time to them on a level ſpot of ground in the garden, and the Vicar continued to enjoy the felicity which ſurrounded him, rather beyond his uſual hour of ſitting up; but on perceiving it was late, he ſtole off, with Maria's little boy, to reſt. I followed him; and having performed my embaſſy, which was to deſire that he would the next Sunday publiſh the banns of marriage between a young couple, I took my leave.

And

And now, bidding the Vicar, his children, and their friends once more adieu, we ſhall deſire our readers to do the ſame; truſting that we have, by the attribu es of rtue, rendered their fortreſs of happineſs impregnable to the ſtorms of fortune.

Welford a few years ago met a young widow at Briſtol Hot-Wells, who was there for the re-eſtabliſhment of her health, which had been conſiderably injured by the violence of her grief for the death of her huſband, for whom ſhe was yet in weeds. Like a ſoldier of humanity, he employed the ſoft artillery of love to comfort the afflicted fair; and, being ſenſibly touched by the luſtre of her eyes, which her tears had not in the leaſt diminiſhed, his endeavours were crowned with ſuch ſucceſs, that he ſoon drove from her boſom its aſſailer, Sorrow, entered the citadel himſelf, and demanded

demanded capitulation of her heart. The lady, wiſely conſidering that her beauty would not, like the walls of Troy, endure a ten years' ſiege, nor her youth, like the Princeſs Hilpa's, continue for a century, ſurrendered at diſcretion, and once more enliſted under the banners of the ſaffron-robed Deity. She poſſeſſed a ſmall landed eſtate, and ſome ready money in the funds, by the judicious employment of which, together with the intereſt ſhe raiſed among the friends of her former huſband, ſhe has contrived to procure for Welford the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Melinda Clifford lived but three years after the relation of her ſtory to the Vicar's girls. With religious hope, pious reſignation, and calm content, ſhe quitted this world for one where alone her ſoul could experience the return of peace. She was

borne

borne to the place of interment by ſix young women; and the Vicar, as he performed the laſt office over her remains, ſhed upon her grave tears of heart-felt pity and regret. The drooping branches of the ſame cypreſs which grows over the grave of Mrs. Ouſeley, caſts their melancholy ſhade upon Melinda's. Let the cruel, profligate, and thoughtleſs ſpoilers of virgin innocence, as they paſs this ſacred ſpot, pauſe for a moment, and, reflecting on the unhappy doom of Melinda, think of the puniſhment that awaits their miſdeeds. Let them ſeriouſly reſolve to reform their conduct; and while the painful ſigh of compunction breaks from their lips, on recollecting the unfortunate objects whoſe happineſs they have deſtroyed, aſk their hearts, whether, if real pleaſure be their aim, unſullied purity is not the ſureſt means of obtaining it? Happy is the

man

man who, from the fair dawn of youth to the ſetting evening of his life, can look back upon his conduct without remorſe; to whoſe mind conſcience can hold up the clear mirror of reflection without exciting an uneaſy emotion!

But I have done: I have endeavoured, throughout my humble narrative, to inculcate the moral contained in the following beautiful lines of Rowe—

"Then to be good is to be happy! Angels
"Are happier than mankind, becauſe they are better.
"Guilt is the ſource of ſorrow; 'tis the fiend,
"Th' avenging fiend, that follows us behind
"With whips and ſtings. The bleſt know none of this,
"But reſt in everlaſting peace of mind,
"And find the height of all their heaven is goodneſs!"

FAIR PENITENT.

I ſhall now, therefore, bid my readers adieu; premiſing that, although I entered the

the field a volunteer, I conſider them as an awful court-martial, on whoſe ſentence my hopes wait with trembling expectation. Their condemnation will baniſh me for ever from the profeſſion; but their acquittal will perhaps, encourage me to ſeek the road of glory. I hope (let me not find it a forlorn hope) that Candour will award a favourable deciſion, that cruel Criticiſm will not totally diſhearten a young adventurer, and that, though Fame may withhold her laurel, Good-nature will interpoſe its ſhield, and protect my production.

4 DE 58

FINIS.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.